THE PERSISTENCE OF SPIRITUAL IDEALS IN ENGLISH LETTERS

HENRY W. SNYDER

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THE FONDREN LECTURES

Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Fondren, members of St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Houston, Texas, gave to Southern Methodist University on May 10, 1919, a fund, the proceeds from which were to be used in the establishment of the FONDREN LECTURES on Christian Missions. The following paragraph from the conditions of the original gift will set forth the spirit and purpose of the Foundation:

The interest on the investment shall be used annually in procuring some competent person to deliver lectures on Christian Missions under the auspices of Southern Methodist University. This fund is dedicated to the foundation of a lectureship on Christian Missions in consideration of other donations made for the upbuilding of Southern Methodist University, and especially the School of Theology thereof, and in the hope that something of good may come directly therefrom and that others more able to give largely may be inspired to devote some portion of the means which they hold in trust as stewards of the Lord to the increase of said fund or to some other laudable enterprise of our Church.

OTHER LECTURES ON THIS FOUNDATION

Dr. Robert Speer: "Missionary Backgrounds" (not published).

Bishop John Monroe Moore: "Making the World Christian." 1921.

Sherwood Eddy: "Facing the Crisis." 1922.

Dr. Kenyon L. Butterfield: "A Christian Program for the Rural Community." 1923.

Bishop Herbert Welch: "That One Face." 1924.

Bishop Edwin D. Mouzon: "The Missionary Evangel." 1925.

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BEING THE FONDREN LECTURES FOR 1926
Delivered before the School of Theology at
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

BY

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INTRODUCTION

LITERATURE, as a record, an interpretation, and an idealization of life in its various manifestations, is older than the art of writing and printing. From the beginning of his life on this planet man has shown an unfailing interest in the significance of the world about him, his relation to it, his experiences on it and with others of his kind, its wonders and mysteries, the brooding presence of strange and mighty forces of which he has ever stood in awe and sought to understand. The rude carvings he cut with hard flint in the soft limestone of his cavern home are not merely for ornamental purposes, a sort of expression of a primitive instinct of beauty, but are rather a narrative in pictures of the world outside with which he was in conflict; his first attempts, as it were, at literature—the art of keeping a record of the experiences of his life.

But because he was a human being he did not stop at merely trying to keep a record. From the first he was a questioner, eagerly curious to understand what it was all about, and through the unfolding centuries of his progress, in an infinite variety of ways, he has attempted to interpret the meaning of himself and the world with which he

is so intimately and mysteriously related. And more than this, he has always been a dreamer with large and inviting visions that forever beckon him forward to greater aspiration and achievement—visions in which he found the undying urge of his future progress.

Before he learned even to write he had already accumulated a body of songs which were a record, an interpretation, an idealization of the life he and his kind had been living, and these songs became the common inheritance of the race to which he belonged. By and by the making of songs naturally developed into an art, the song-maker became an artist, and literature was born, the supreme method by which the human spirit expresses its life, its aspirations, its ideals, its understanding of the meaning and wonder of things. To the content, moreover, was added, in the course of time, a certain consistency of structure and a beauty and nobility of speech. It therefore became literature in the sense not only that the ideas themselves were worthy of record and remembrance, but also that the style itself in which they were clothed was characterized by an appropriate distinction of manner. However, it was the ideas that chiefly gave to it the element of permanency, and these, from the beginning, were deeply concerned with moral and religious conceptions of life.

The fact is that what is really great in the literatures of the world seems to have acquired that

greatness because in them is recorded man's unquenchable longing to satisfy the spiritual aspirations of his nature and his passion to conform his conduct to idealized standards of morality. What constitute spiritual values and standards of morality may shift and vary in the slow age-long struggle of the race upward from the lower levels of primitive conditions to the high attainments of what is called civilized culture; nevertheless, the most significant element in the struggle as it is expressed in literature is the vital presence of the stir and movement of the forces in human nature that have their impulse in the religious motives. It is the play of these forces in poem, in drama, and in narrative that gives worth and distinction and permanency to certain books that are universally regarded as the noblest products of the genius of man. Of course, this is not to say that the world's literature has not in it much that is trivial, that touches the mere surface of life, or even that is not only unmoral, but immoral; yet the truth is, when we start to select out of the huge mass of the material that makes up what is called universal literature, we shall have in our hands a comparatively few books, but they will be profoundly moral in their interpretation of life and character and charged through and through with the sense of the priceless worth of the things of the spirit.

In particular has this been true of the English-speaking race. From the beginning of its history

it will be found that its literature has kept alive in terms of beauty the significance of fundamental moral ideals—duty, loyalty, honor, courage, sacrifice, service. In its interpretation and idealization of the meaning of life it has made these the touchstone of the worth and dignity of character, and fidelity to them the real measure of success or failure. Just to name these fundamental moralities may seem to be calling to mind only certain drab commonplaces of everyday ethics, yet they are never quite absent from what is essentially great in English letters—only they are wrought upon by the magic alchemy of genius until they shine forth in the beauty and power of something strange and new: ideals that challenge the soul to high and noble living and set the goal of satisfying attainment.

It is also true that what is most characteristic in English letters as well as what is greatest has served to enlighten, to steady and lead the faith of the race in the necessity, the inevitableness of the final triumph of the forces of justice and righteousness. All along through their history the English folk have kept before them the conviction that there is a moral order in the world, and, though it may be thrown out of equilibrium and the powers of evil be in the ascendant, such a state of affairs can only be temporary. Somehow in the processes of time righteousness and justice must come to their own, and the life of the individual as well as the collective life of the

society to which he belongs must, in the long run, be purged and purified, and the moral equilibrium restored. The result is that English literature of the representative kind shows little or nothing of the mood of spiritual defeat that characterizes so much of the literature of other lands. One misses in it almost wholly the sense of hopelessness and despair that envelops with the weight of a depressing gloom the poetry, the fiction, and the drama of continental peoples. It is, even when picturing life's most tragic experiences, wholesome with the tonic of a spiritual optimism born of a faith in the inherently conquering power of what is just, and honest, and true, and lovely, and of good report.

English letters, moreover, are vital with a sense of the presence of God in the world, and with the resulting belief that man and nature are under a divine order, in which nothing moves with aimless feet, and through which God is working out his purposes toward beneficent ends. It may be that his purposes are but dimly understood or not at all, yet faith affirms that He is directing the course of things, that He is forever on the side of the forces that make for righteousness, and that in the end these will prevail. In such conceptions, transfigured as they are by the imagination of the man of letters, one discovers again the source of that moral seriousness and spiritual idealism that set English literature apart from other great racial literatures.

English literature is also profoundly saturated with the standards and spirit of the Bible. Its fundamental teachings with reference to sin and righteousness, good and evil, God and Christ, the brotherhood of man, the divine fatherhood, the glory of sacrifice and service, the supreme exaltation of the spiritual above the material—in manifold forms of expression and from every variety of standpoint—have been the great storehouse from which poet, and dramatist, and novelist have drawn their ideas of the meaning and worth of life, and which have furnished to them their most radiant visions of the possibilities of human nature when at its best.

Perhaps to no other people has the Bible meant so much in shaping their character and determining the successive steps in their history as it has meant to the English people. In the very early days when, as scattered tribes warring for supremacy among themselves, they were not yet a people, its principles and truths supplanted the older heathenism they had brought with them from Germany, and through the centuries, in almost every great period in the process of their becoming a nation, the Bible has exercised an influence of immeasurable power. In fact, the story of its translation into the vernacular speech can be written in terms of the shaping of the life of the nation because the struggle for the right of each to read and interpret the Bible message for himself is central in every movement of political prog-

ress toward freedom. And the struggle has been therefore of the nature of a religious passion to appropriate its truths and principles as the only sure guide to conduct and the only measure of the worth of character. In this religious passion for the stern morality of the Bible and its lofty spiritual idealism, one discovers what is best in the English temperament, and understands the persistence of those spiritual ideals that are the outstanding characteristics of what is most representative in the literary history of the race. It is the purpose of the present study to follow the steady flow of this stream of spiritual idealism in English literature that has given to it its most characteristic ideas and those qualities that differentiate it from the other great literatures of the world.

I

AT THE HEAD OF THE STREAM

I

At the Head of the Stream

The earlier writers of the Greek and Roman world who give accounts of the Germanic tribes that entered England in the fifth and sixth centuries are generally agreed that they were characterized by certain moral excellences. This is particularly the case with Tacitus' account of them. They were serious-minded, reverenced their gods, had a peculiarly high regard for womanhood, were extravagantly brave, respected their pledges, and, at their best, were loyal to duty and to one another at any cost. Such qualities, though greatly idealized, appear in that epic of their life which has come down to us under the name of *Beowulf,* and which they probably brought with them from their older home along the low-lying lands that jutted into the Baltic and North Seas.

An almost indistinguishable conglomerate, as this poem is, of fact, of tradition, of myth, and of manufactured fable, it, nevertheless, is a presentation of what the people would have liked to be in their best moments of achievement if it is not actually a record of what their race heroes were and did. At any rate, when the scop gathered

together out of the memories of the race the widely scattered, yet known to all, material of the poem and shaped it into the consistency of a unified production to be sung by wandering gleeman and minstrel to groups everywhere, it was not a new story, not even fiction, but rather it made its appeal chiefly because it was the accepted record of a yesterday in their lives so true to the ideals of their own day that they found their immediate standards of living and aspiration in it.

Therefore, if we find this Beowulf, "the first knight-errant," as Taine calls him, "before the days of chivalry," prodigally brave, a gallant fighter against the grim, stark forces of nature and of his own kind, unswerving in his loyalty, keeping his pledge to friend and foe alike, giving service where service is needed, serious in thought, deeply mindful of the overruling presence of the gods and of Fate—we may be sure that in him we have revealed the best qualities of the race of which he is the idealized representative. Other qualities this folk may have had and did have, but out of their insight into themselves, the soul of the people, so to speak, thrilled to the chant of scop and gleeman when they sang of the high virtues and the resulting heroic achievements of Beowulf because the stirring song brought them face to face with their finer selves—as the revelation of what is essentially great always does for a people who have within them potentially the qualities of greatness.

The French historian of English literature, Taine, says that "a race so constituted is predisposed to Christianity by its gloom, its aversion to sensual and reckless living, its inclination for the serious and the sublime." On a day at the Court of King Eadwine in Northumbria, more than a century after the completion of the Germanic conquest of the Island, the two religions stood face to face, the ancestral paganism and the new faith from Rome. One of the Elders rises to remind the King of the lighted fires and warmth of the hall in the drear and bitter winter time. "All without is rain and snow and storm," he says; "then comes a swallow flying across the hall; he enters by one door and leaves by another. The brief moment while he is within is pleasant to him; he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather, but the moment is brief—the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such is the life of man on earth compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for a while, but what is the time which comes after—the time which was before, we know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty, it were well that we should regard it."

This voice of the old English paganism is essentially the cry of deep religious aspiration, and, if it is representative, and we may well believe that it is, beneath the cruelties and barbarisms of that far time, there are already the spiritual longings

and the moral earnestness that seem "to predispose this race to Christianity." With their sense of reverence, their devotion to duty, their recognition of fundamental moral obligations, their mystical acceptance of a world encompassed about by the mighty presences of the forces of nature and even of forces beyond nature—they seem to be walking with uncertain feet in a dim twilight of vanishing gods, and out of a hunger of the spirit are poignantly seeking an answer to life's religious needs because at bottom they are themselves naturally of a certain religiousness of temperament.

Celtic missionaries from the Island of Iona, inspired and directed by St. Columba's zeal for Christian conquest, met the invading hordes of German paganism in the North with the message of the Gospels even before Gregory the Great's missionaries under St. Augustine landed on the shores of Kent in the South in 597. Churches and monasteries were established, with the result that in less than two centuries there were not only centers strong enough to influence mightily the religious life of the day, but also seats of learning as famous as any in Europe for scholarship and the spread of knowledge and religion. A Church that could send forth an apostolic missionary like St. Cuthbert and nourish a scholar like the great Bæda was winning in its fight to transform the inherent moral qualities of the Germanic conquerors into the finer standards and ideals of the

Christian faith. To be sure, this transformation was not complete. The conflict between Thor and Christ was bitter and prolonged, but in the midst of the warring, jangling confusions, of the slaughters and desolations of the wars between the Northern, Middle, and Southern Kingdoms, of the ruthless brutalities and unmitigated destructiveness of the Danish invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries—in all of which Thor still seemed to rule and the old paganisms were in the ascendant—nevertheless, though church, and school, and monastery were in ruins, the voice of Christianity could not be quite silenced and the foundations for those virtues and religious standards that have characterized the English race ever since were already securely laid.

It may be affirmed that missionaries had carried the Bible stories everywhere, and had so told them that they had become the common possession of the people. Moreover, they had translated them into the vernacular in such simplicity of language that they might be understood of all men, and the fact of the preservation of even a few translations, particularly of the Gospels and the Psalms, out of the chaos of that stormy formative period in the history of the race, would seem to indicate that a knowledge of the Bible text must have been comparatively widespread.

But those old English were a singing folk. The first authentic record, interpretation, and idealization of their life is a song, and *Beowulf* and their

other songs of battle and of wanderings, stark and grim of mood, shadowed with the gloom of haunted misty landscapes, of gray winter skies, of hail-beaten seas, loud with the croakings of the war-ravens and the howling of the slaughter-wolves, brightened only now and again by the light of the fires of the mead-halls—such songs reveal the significant position occupied in the life of people by the maker and singer of songs—scop, gleeman, and minstrel. Comrade of kings and noblemen, he was a combination of historian, musician, entertainer, inspirer, and prophet. Welcome in hall and by fireside, he wandered from village to village, singing the stories that constituted the common inheritance of the people.

It may be said, therefore, that the old English were educated to song. Whatever message life had for them came in this form, and what the scop composed and the gleeman sang was a part of the common consciousness of the folk to be repeated by them even in the absence of the professional singer. Moreover, when the minstrel became a priest what more natural than that, accepting what people were accustomed to, he should consecrate an art that had been applied to pagan uses to the higher ends of Christian propaganda. And this is precisely what happened. The narratives of the Old and New Testaments, told in the familiar rhythmic alliterative verse-forms, began early to supplant those ancient songs of which *Beowulf* is the supreme type, and more

effective than sermon or reading from the text to an assembled company for the spread of Christianity was the fact of their being carried in the older molds to which the people were accustomed by long-inherited habits and practices.

That the religious ideals of both the Old and the New Testaments were made an essential part of the consciousness of the English nation while the people were in process of becoming English may be justly inferred by reason of that body of poetry which has come down to us with the names of Cædmon and Cynewulf attached to it. In spite of the detailed account of the former given by the historian Bæda, critical scholars are rather inclined to doubt even the existence of such a poet as Cædmon. However, any doubt cast upon Bæda's beautiful story of how the Swineherd, dumb at the feast when the song and harp went round, withdrew in his humiliation to seek appropriate companionship with the cattle in the stalls, and falling asleep, found himself miraculously endowed with the gift of sacred song, cannot cast any doubt upon the existence of the songs themselves and of their significance as testimony to the prevalence of a popular body of songs of the same type. Bæda himself, 673–735, knew the poems that have come to us under the name of Cædmon—the *Genesis,* the *Exodus,* and the *Daniel*—as the possession of the generation immediately preceding him, and his description of their contents and his brief quotation from the opening of the *Genesis*

are evidences enough that at least in his own day they had not passed out of use.

It may be asserted, therefore, that in the seventh century, before the devastating incursions of the Danes, this really great group of poems had poured the story of the Creation of the World, the Fall of Man, and the Flight out of Egypt into the ancient verse forms, and told it in the mood and spirit of the older paganism. It is as genuinely an epic of a converted heathenism as the *Beowulf* was the epic of an unredeemed heathenism, and we may assume that, as in the case of the latter, its author was the superior shaper of the songs that the many were singing, that he was no lonely poet breaking like a pioneer into new fields of song, but rather one who probably took materials that were a kind of common property, and, because he was the genius that others were not, gave to the materials that touch of greatness, that form and consistency, that reality and vitality of popular appeal to his own generation that assured for them their preservation while all the rest perished in the wreckage that was soon to follow.

> "Most right it is to chant the ceaseless praïse
> Of Him who guards the starry heights of blue
> And even, with enraptured hearts, adore
> The Glory-King of Heaven's Angelic host."

So begins, in free translation, the opening words of Cædmon's *Genesis,* and so speaks the first authentic voice in the long history of English

Letters. All else before this may properly belong to the English before they left their older home on the continent. But this is native of English soil, and breaks forth out of the earliest springs of the national genius. The older paganism has been subdued to the color of Christian ideals, and the fundamentally religious mood that marked the temperament of the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the Island has been sufficiently wrought upon by the spirit of the new faith to have become Christian in standards and aspirations.

That this is essentially so is revealed in the poems attributed to Cynewulf, who was of the third generation following Cædmon—the *Christ, Andreas, Juliana, Elene.* These are poems that have to do with the life of Christ, the wanderings of his apostles, and with the miraculous lives of two of the saints of the early Church, St. Juliana and St. Helena. While they retain the older epic forms and no little of even the mood and spirit of that pagan world to which he who composed them and they for whom they were composed are still so close, they are, nevertheless, thoroughly saturated with Christian thought and sentiment, and are doubtless representative of others of their kind. Similar narratives embodying the same conceptions must have been sung by many a gleeman as a part of his repertoire for the instruction and entertainment of eager listeners as the art of minstrelsy was practiced up and down the land. Cynewulf himself was a gleeman who had wan-

dered in wild ways singing the oldest songs of his race till one day there came to him the vision of the Cross, and the spirit of the Christ put a new song in his mouth, and the blood-stained rood becomes the beacon of light and healing to all men as it had been to him:

> "Bid all men to this beacon betake them;
> On me aforetime the Son of God hung in anguish,
> Whence it comes that now I stand towering in splendor
> To heal every man who gazes in awe upon me."

Thor and Woden have gone forever, or remain as slumbering memories to be awakened only as ghosts that walk in the twilight of slowly dying superstitions. But never again will they rule the thoughts and direct the conduct of these German tribes who, though not yet a nation and tragically divided among themselves in their new home, have appropriated, if not completely assimilated, the faith which Irish and Roman missionaries have brought to such a degree that, in the long course of their subsequent history, they will test all they are and do by its standards, and, when poet, and dramatist, and novelist are truest to their best, each will, in his own way, be brother in the spirit to Cædmon and Cynewulf, and will be accepted by the answering soul of his people as the voice of their own best moods of aspiration and achievement. In a word, the note of moral earnestness and spiritual idealism are never to be absent from the thought of those who in noble speech interpret

what is most characteristic of the race in its great movements of experience and progress.

We have been assuming that the religious ideals that appeared in this early period of the formation of the English people were not merely the ideals of the gifted singer, but also that they represented the aspirations of a folk more or less saturated with the moral conceptions inspired by Christianity. In the midst of the internal strife, underneath the wreckage of the Danish invasions, in the chaos of conditions in which there seemed to be no single integrating force, there was the unity of a faith and of religious ideals which, now obscured and submerged, now flaming forth in compelling and conquering vitality, should never die out of the life of this people, just as it never quite disappears from what is most characteristic in their literature. Priest and singer have done their work so well that already by the ninth century the transformation, while it may not be complete, is at least permanent in the dominating quality of its influence.

In hardly three centuries after these scattered German tribes have conquered the land and before they have ceased warring among themselves for supremacy, Beowulf has become a hero of the Old Testament leading the chosen people through the wilderness or one of the apostles serving in strange lands, and Hrothgar of the Great Hall has been realized in that Alfred who is the first Englishman to be called great in the history of his

race. In actual character and accomplishment he may be well described as the noble fruit of that tree of Christian faith that had been first planted on English soil by Irish and Roman missionaries. A mighty hunter, reckless in daring, a lover and singer of the old songs of his race, soldier and statesman, builder of monasteries and seats of learning and religion, translator of the *Philosophy of Boethius,* Gregory's *Care of Souls,* Orosius' *Universal History,* to which he made first hand additions, and of Bæda's *Ecclesiastical History of England,* with dreams of an educational system through which every freeborn youth might be taught to read and write his native tongue—he crowded into the span of the twenty-nine years of his troubled reign a variety of practical activities for the religious and material upbuilding of his people such as have been compassed by few English sovereigns since his day. According to the historian Green, however, what really lifts him to the level of the world's greatest men is "the moral grandeur of his life." "He lived solely for the good of his people," and "put aside every personal aim or ambition to devote himself to the welfare of those he ruled." Toward the end of his days he himself wrote simply; "So long as I have lived I have striven to live worthily."

II

THE SHAPING OF RACIAL IDEALS

II

The Shaping of Racial Ideals

Neither the Danish invasions, immediately after his death, nor the Norman conquest a century and a half later will be able to change essentially and permanently the character of a people out of whose life could grow a man of the type of King Alfred. The fact is, the Norman conquest following the Battle of Hastings in 1066, with all that it brought into the religious, political, and social life of the Anglo-Saxon people that was alien to their genius, modified in a comparatively slight degree in the end the quality of the moral fiber and spiritual temperament of this stubbornly tenacious folk.

To be sure, the conquest profoundly affected the matter of the language in respect to its vocabulary, but it still remained idiomatically English. It also introduced a culture and a social organization foreign in their essential features, but it is to be doubted whether at bottom the masses of the people were materially changed in their habits and outlook upon life. What modifications there were, were largely upon the surface. Beneath it all still ran the deeper of currents whose source headed

back four hundred years when this folk was beginning to acquire that moral seriousness which has marked it ever since.

In the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, representing what may be called the period of amalgamation, or the grafting of the Norman branch upon the English stock, while the Anglo-Saxon tradition seems for the time to be lost under the invasion of an alien culture, it yet shows itself in sufficient force to indicate that it is still alive underneath the surface. French singers sang for court and castle songs quite foreign to the Anglo-Saxon genius in form, content, and language. It should be remembered that the whole body of Old English literature was utterly serious in mood and purpose, whether pagan or Christian. It knew not at all the lighter vein of the French minstrels nor the coarse, trivial themes that characterized no little of it. But if in Latin and French, both in verse and prose, there were histories written in the religious mood and from the Christian viewpoint, sermons and homilies for the moral edification of those who could understand both languages, if the King Arthur stories out of the legendary life of ancient pagan Britain were retold in French and Latin and their paganism Christianized and redeemed with a spiritual purpose—the same material also now and again found expression in the speech of the people in a manner to prove that the masses themselves were sharing in whatever of religious appeal the literature of the period might

have for those who were of the courtly and learned classes. It was Layamon, a country priest, who, in 1203, with hardly a dozen words of French origin in the thousands of lines in his poem, the *Brut,* made it possible for the English folk to have in their own tongue all and more than Geoffrey of Monmouth made so popular in Latin and Wace in French. Moreover, when Orm, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, paraphrases the Gospels into simple English verse and explains why he wrote his book—that "all young Christian folk may depend upon the Gospel only, that they with their whole might might follow the Gospel's holy teaching in thought, word, and deed"—we may be sure that such as he is taking care that the inherited religious traditions shall not die out of the life of the common people. To quite the same purpose are the words of the unknown poet of the middle of the century (13th) who, like Cædmon, five hundred years before him, turned the Book of Genesis into English verse: "The song is drawn from Latin into English, and Christian men who hear the story of salvation in little words of the speech of their own land should be as glad as birds are of the coming of the dawn."

What is insisted on here is that while the race was receiving the Norman influence, and that nationality, which should remain forever English, was in process of formation in the eventful years between 1066 and 1400, when it seemed that the original native stratum might be buried under an

alien continental culture—minstrel, priest, monk, friar, and layman saw to it that the common folk should not fail to have religious truth made plain to them in a form with which they were familiar and in a speech which they could understand. As late as 1320 the unknown author of *Cursor Mundi,* "The Course of the World," told the whole Bible story, embellished with much that was not of the Bible, though religious in purpose, for those who could understand neither Latin nor French. It may be taken for granted, moreover, that a poem like this was more or less a composition into which were woven legends of saints and homilies that interpreted the religious instruction with which the masses of the people were familiar and thus represented the effort on that part of the priestly author to unify for a wider use the message of the Church. The half dozen or more manuscripts that survive and the variety of dialects in them are a testimony to the widespread popularity that continues into the fourteenth century the themes, with of course vast additions, and the methods of religious teaching of Cædmon in the seventh.

At the same time the stream of English nationalism was gaining head throughout the fourteenth century. Parliament had become, at least in its fundamental features, during the reign of Edward III something like the real voice of the people; trade and commerce were renewed and expanded; chivalry, though soon destined to die, bloomed into its finest flower; and the victories of Crécy and

Poitiers swelled the tide of nationalism; the English language had become the speech of nobleman as well as commoner, and from now on all literature that expected a popular hearing had to be written in a native English understood of all. Celt, Dane, Saxon, and Norman have at last become one folk, and the lines of their development will never again be retarded or deflected. But it is the Anglo-Saxon ideals, religious at the core, that have mainly survived the shifting changes of time and circumstance. Chaucer, though he makes quite obvious in much that he wrote the persistence of foreign influences, when he closes his literary career with the *Canterbury Tales,* is not French in speech or message, but soundly English in mood and view of life, and when he touches the fundamental experiences of human nature wholesomely moral without being deliberately a moralist.

It was John Wycliffe that lifted the torch of religious idealism in the spiritual darkness that had fallen upon England and indeed upon the whole of Europe. The Church had grown immensely wealthy, and had allied itself with the forces of organized oppression. Within was dissension and corruption, and it seemed to have lost its soul, with the result that it failed to keep the respect and the confidence of the masses of the people. Even the wit of the tolerant Chaucer becomes biting when, in the *Canterbury Tales,* he draws the pictures of the representatives of the

Church, excepting only the 'poor parson' who "taught Christ's Gospel, but followed it himself." In this case, his sympathetic interpretation of what the real preacher should be is actually more of an indictment of the Church and a rebuke of its practices than his humorous or more or less satiric treatment of those whose lives fell so far below its commonly accepted ideals.

Wycliffe, however, was no man of letters, smilingly presenting the procession of life with the pen of an artist, but an ardent reformer, whose soul was in fervent revolt against conditions in Church and society—conditions for which the Church had no vital message of healing and reconciliation. This Oxford schoolman turned from his logic and Latin to announce the stirring call of freedom of thought, of life, and of religion in the vernacular speech. While unfortunately he allowed himself and his movement to be entangled in the confused and corrupt politics of the day, nevertheless his own motives were of the highest, and he stands in the vanguard of the crusaders of liberty for all the people. It was to them that his "poor preachers," contemptuously called Lollards, carried the simple teachings of the Gospels in the native dialect, and he himself addressed them in the common speech in pamphlet after pamphlet of valiant religious appeal, affirming that the Scriptures should be translated out of a foreign tongue into a language that plowman and tradesman could understand and interpret for themselves.

This was the task that he set for himself in the last days of his life, and in the year before his brave spirit left a body worn with fightings beyond measure, 1383, appeared the translation of the entire Bible that bears his name into the common vernacular—the first approximately complete translation of the Scriptures into English. Its racy, idiomatic style, never far from the flavor of the soil, simple, direct, natural, vivid with the concrete picturesqueness of the speech of the common people, is the model from which no subsequent translation attempts to depart, and is the rich mine from which not a few of our familiar scriptural phrases have been dug. Its extraordinary popularity among the masses of the people and the nature and extent of its influence are testified to by the more than 150 manuscripts that have survived to this day after all that organized persecution could do toward their complete destruction. Everywhere in the secret places of the land, where large or small groups could be gotten together, it was read, recited, memorized, and fragments of it tenaciously preserved, so that it entered into the minds and hearts of the people to a degree that kept alive among them its ideals of thought and standards of conduct.

What, therefore, had been done through the long centuries, beginning with Cædmon by means of poem and homily and fragments of the Scripture turned into the native speech, to saturate the life of the people with the familiar religious ideals and morality of the Holy Bible was thus continued

in an impressively effective way by this first Protestant in the history of modern Europe, whom it is no merely beautiful turn of rhetoric to describe as the "morning star of the Reformation." The "star" may seem to go down in the darkness that settled over England for the next hundred years, but its light once seen, its significance once understood, and its reality put even to the test of the fires of martyrdom, it remains as a lasting influence that underneath the surface gathers power with the years.

Just how deep and wide was this fourteenth-century sowing of the seed of the spiritual element in English literature may be inferred from a brief glance at one of Wycliffe's contemporaries who, with almost equal fervor of reform, indicted and interpreted the whole life of his day according to the same standards, but in the method and manner of the older poets who had gone before him. William Langland spent nearly twenty years in writing, expanding, and revising his *Vision of Piers Plowman*—that is, at least from 1362 to 1380. It is a very mirror of his day written with the purpose to make better those unhappy last fifty years of the fourteenth century. Behind the mazy tangle of its medieval theology and all but endless allegories, there is a vivid picture of the sins, the sorrows, the corruptions of that whole English world—social, political, and religious—and through it all is heard the cry out of the heart of the poor and toiling masses, disinherited of

both their material and spiritual possessions. Conditions that brought on the so-called Peasants' Revolt are vividly and tragically alive in Langland's poem, and one feels that here for the first time in literature the underprivileged and the despoiled have found a voice resonant with a sense of sympathy and understanding and brave enough to challenge the very order of things for the righting of wrongs in the name of justice and religion. It is a voice that rings with a clear sincerity and a flaming, moral earnestness. Out of the wilderness of vice and wrong, over the familiar paths of the Catholic Middle Ages, the Plowman leader strives to bring folk to Truth, and God, and Christ, and Love. For it is only as they arrive where these are that there can be any hope for righteousness, peace, justice, and good will on the earth; and unless such ideals of the Christian faith are realized in the lives of all men, rich and poor, cleric and layman, nobleman and serf, there can be no cure for the ills that shadow life with a tragic gloom. Thus while Chaucer saw his world with the smile of an artist and accepted all manner of folk and their experiences as so much engaging material to be woven by the magic of his genius into a many-hued tapestry, William Langland, with far less art, yet in rugged phrase, harked back to the older literary traditions, and at times, with even the burning intensity of a prophet, indicts wrong and injustice in the high places of Church and State, calls a corrupt and blind world to

repentance, takes the cause of the poor and oppressed to his heart, and points to the only way of escape over the road that leads to salvation—to the God of peace and love.

That its message was not wholly forgotten in the centuries that followed is attested by the fact that it was printed three times in ten years—1550, 1553, 1561, there being three editions in 1550. It is quite probable, moreover, that through the "Century of Darkness," as the fifteenth has been called, it served as a beam of spiritual light, along with the miracle plays, to keep burning in the heart of the common people the sacred flame of religious faith and ideals. At any rate, the fact of its revival when the Renaissance was well on the way in England and when the Protestant Reformation was an accomplished fact is a sign of its enduring virtue a century and a half after it was written, and we can well believe that the oppressed people in whose behalf it was written never let its message of hope and comfort die out of their memories.

But the hundred years that followed the death of Langland, characterized by a dearth of anything like genuine literature and indeed of any apparently worth-while intellectual activity, still retained the religious drama as a means of preserving and presenting the truths and ideals of religion. Starting from certain simple but impressive parts of the Catholic liturgy like, for example, the Burial of the Crucifix on Good

Friday, mystery and miracle plays gradually developed until almost the entire Bible history, together with lives of the saints, was dramatically treated for the instruction and entertainment of the people. The first stage was the altar of the Church and the first actors were its priests. But because of the fact that dramatic presentation is far more effective than any other form of the spoken word, these plays became immensely popular and were taken over by secular organizations that carried them out of the Church into the open air and presented them upon movable stages. In the natural course of their development, there followed the morality plays, in which, through the personification of the virtues and vices, the truths and doctrines of the Church were taught in a living way.

Such plays might well be described as dramatic allegories, thus differing from the characteristic medieval habit of expressing religious truth and offering religious instruction only by the method of presentation. To clothe the virtues and vices in costume and have them speak and act before us —to do the same thing with the heroes of both the Old and the New Testaments and with the saints of the Church—is to appeal with a realism of effect far more powerful in its influence than that of any other method hitherto used. Certainly neither reading from the Scripture text, nor spoken sermon, nor recitation in poetic form could so grip mind and imagination as could this dramatic

presentation in mystery, miracle, and morality play. Consequently, while the religious drama was training in dramatic appreciation the folk who should crowd the London playhouses in the great days of the Elizabethan stage, it was also preparing the way for the Protestant Reformation by being one of the significant influences for maintaining religious faith and ideals in the hearts of the common people. No account, therefore, of the persistence of religious ideals in English literature could afford to leave out of consideration the important contribution made by the religious drama.

Other and mightier forces were at work to confirm the English people in their ancient faith and to prepare the way for an extraordinary revival of the traditional ideals. The dawn of the newer day of intellectual and religious freedom that had been the promise of Wycliffe's labors began to break out of the east in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The mind and spirit of the modern world renewed themselves by drinking at the fountain of the freshly recovered riches of Greek and Roman learning. All Europe awoke to a vital consciousness of the necessity of investigating the meaning of life and of the realities of the universe to which men were related. The spirit of intellectual adventure proceeded, in the mood of the pioneer seeking to find new worlds, to test the foundations of knowledge and to add to it in every field of human interest—scientific, social, political, and religious.

It is profoundly significant, as it affected permanently the directions of subsequent progress, that in England, as in Germany, the inspiring and enlightening results of the Renaissance at once were applied to the service of religion and were among the controlling elements in the Protestant Reformation. If in Italy and the south of Europe the New Learning, liberating the human spirit from the shackles in which it had been so long bound, turned men back to the enjoyment of the freer paganism of the ancient world, in the north of Europe its influence served to deepen and strengthen the expanding current of a religious liberty that in less than a century made possible a Bible in the hands of all the people in their own tongue, and with such a freedom in its use that each might read and interpret it for himself.

When Colet and the Oxford scholars brought the spirit and methods of the New Learning from Italy they frankly declared their purpose to be to consecrate their scholarship to the end that all the people might have a better understanding of the sacred Scriptures. This purpose is expressed in the memorable words of the Dutch scholar Erasmus, who was himself a disciple of the Oxford humanists: "I wish that even the weakest woman might read the Gospels and Epistles of St. Paul. I long for the day when the husbandman shall sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plow, when the weaver shall hum them to the tune of his shuttle, when the traveler shall while away with their stories the weariness of his journey."

Scholarship and the expanding spirit of the new day have thus come to the aid of influences long accumulating in the consciousness of the people and given definite expression by John Wycliffe in his translation of the Scriptures. William Tyndale took up the task in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, affirming that he would bring it about that "ere many years the boy that drives the plow would know more of the Scriptures" than learned doctor or priest. But he had to go to the continent to accomplish his ends, and finally pay the price of martyrdom for the printed sheets that were smuggled into his native land. However, the mood of the times was such that the work of disseminating the Scriptures in the common speech, while it might be delayed by the fires of the stake and the ruthless bitterness of persecutions, could never again be quite arrested. The result was that translations came in rapid succession during the next three-quarters of a century, culminating at last in the King James Version of 1611.

We are not here concerned so much with the different steps in the translation of the Bible into the native speech as with, for our purpose, the more significant fact that the translators did not create the demand for translations. In what they did they were but answering the voice of the people—a voice growing in power because behind it was a consciousness saturated already with Biblical ideals and truths, and insistent that they should have in a language understood by all these

ideals and these truths. The pageants given in honor of Queen Elizabeth at her coronation were not all empty shows and flattering ceremonies. The hearts and convictions of the people spoke when the Daughter of Time, Truth, presented the newly crowned Queen with the Book of the Holy Scriptures, and when there was offered a petition asking, as one of the acts of grace, the release of "five prisoners," the evangelists and the apostle Paul, "long shut up in an unknown tongue, as it were in prison, so that they cannot converse with the common people."

The results of the struggle to make it possible for the evangelists and all the other heroes of the Bible "to converse with the common people" were of tremendous significance in coloring the spirit and motives of the literature of the day because of the fact that they were even more significant in their influence upon the life of the people themselves. The statement of the historian Green with reference to the nature and extent of this influence may be accepted without question: "No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the reign of Elizabeth from the meeting of the Long Parliament. England became the people of a book and that Book was the Bible. It was as yet the one book that was familiar to every Englishman. . . . Elizabeth might silence or tune the pulpits; but it was impossible for her to silence or tune the great preachers of justice, and mercy,

and truth, who spoke from the book she had again opened for her people. The whole moral effect which is produced nowadays by the religious newspaper, the tract, the essay, the lecture, the missionary report, the sermon was then produced by the Book alone; and its effect in this way, however dispassionately we examine it, was simply amazing. One dominant influence told on human action; and all the activities that had been called into life by the age that was passing away were seized, concentrated, and steadied to a definite aim by the spirit of religion."

III

IDEALIST AND REALIST

III

Idealist and Realist

The spirit of religion dominated the genius of Edmund Spenser, the first great literary artist after the death of Chaucer. The term of his life, 1552–1599, was almost coincident with the reign of Queen Elizabeth, 1558–1603, and his *Faërie Queene* appeared in the last decade of her rule. The friend of Leicester, Sidney, and Raleigh, himself a man of action as well as a poet, he breathed the air of those spacious times that saw the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the far voyages of the English Sea Kings, the extraordinary social and industrial development of the people, the expansion of trade and commerce at home and abroad, the widespread advancement of knowledge, the amazing intellectual and literary activity that expressed itself in dramatic form, and, finally, through the cruelties of persecution and the fires of martyrdom the settlement of the issue that England was to be forever Protestant and not Catholic.

All the tremendous significance of his world was absorbed and appropriated by the genius of Spenser. But even more than this. Back to

Chaucer and beyond he went for the sources of his art and the materials for his poetry—to the King Arthur legends of heathen Britain and their subsequent religious transformations at the hands of Christian writers, to the folklore, myths, and traditions of his native land, and to old and new romances floating everywhere through the mind of Europe. He was also essentially a child of the Renaissance with his worship of beauty, his generous intellectual interests, his appreciation and knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics, particularly of the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. What the past and present knew he seems to have gathered as his own to transmute into the shining gold of his resplendent art. For inwoven in the gorgeous, confusingly complicated tapestry of the *Faërie Queene* are strands drawn from almost every field of the world's knowledge.

But if on this account the whole structure of the poem is a labyrinthine maze in which Spenser himself appears not infrequently to be lost, and if any central theme at times seems hopelessly buried in a bewildering mass of incidents and far-fetched materials, nevertheless, there can be no doubt whatever of the poet's intention to depict the life of man in terms of a religious allegory. That this is his intention, even the casual reader will not need to be informed, for he so stated it in a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh: "The general end therefore of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline."

For meandering as he does into a thousand by-paths that lose themselves in a tangled wilderness of apparently unrelated incidents, still the poet never fails to leave the impression of a high religious seriousness and of the abiding presence of Christian ideals. Read the poem continuously or dip into it where you will, you will be constantly aware of this unity of design and spirit.

The truth is, in method and conception the *Faërie Queene* does not differ essentially from the method and conception of those who had gone before Spenser. Of course, there is a not-to-be-measured difference in the wealth of knowledge, in the unbounded richness of Spenser's materials, in his consecration to ideals of sheer beauty, and in his magic mastery of the medium of his art as compared with any who had written before him. But, as we have already seen, it was no new thing to visualize the moral and religious struggles of man in the form of the allegory and to personify the virtues and vices of human nature, and to do both for didactic purposes. The point here is that Spenser was but keeping faith with the great tradition in English Letters when he chose the allegory as the purple robe in which his imagination should clothe his conceptions of the religious life.

Holiness, Chastity, Temperance, Justice, Courtesy are Knights of Chivalry battling with all the sins of the flesh and the mind and the temptations that come to men in their pilgrimage through

life, and Truth and Divine Grace are ever close at hand to offer help to those that ask and are worthy of it. Each Knight fares forth upon a gallant adventure of the spirit that leads him through haunted valleys, to caves where grim destroying dragons are, to fair places of unholy, beguiling enchantments, before castles of evil that must be stormed and taken, and without ceasing must the Knight of the Great Virtues be battling to save his soul against the Knights of the Great Vices if he would at last win his right of entrance into the Divine Presence.

With its six Books, twelve Cantos to the Book and more than forty thousand lines, the poem is, in reality, a glorified *Pilgrim's Progress* when stripped of the gorgeous paraphernalia and the heavy trappings of its affected medievalism—so thoroughly Puritan is it in its stern morality and its picture of man's religious strivings upward against foes within and foes without. Spenser, in his way, is just as much in earnest as Bunyan is in his. If the Elizabethan poet saw the vision of the great life in terms of the Knight of the Red Cross at war with all the personified forces of evil, the prisoner in Bedford jail saw it in terms of a plain man walking the common ways, sorely beset by the same forces, but clad in gray homespun, climbing the hard paths that lead to the Celestial City. And both are comrades, gallant bearers of the torch of that religious idealism which, though, at times, it may grow dim, never quite goes out

during all the long history of the literature of the race.

When the first three Books of the *Faërie Queene* came from the press in 1590, that most extraordinary blossoming of human genius, the Elizabethan drama, was well on the way, and the young Shakespeare was just beginning to try his prentice hand. The world had witnessed nothing comparable to this dramatic outburst since the days of the master Greek makers of plays. It seemed that only in this form could the genius of England at the moment of its greatest vitality find appropriate and adequate expression. It was the stage that became the mirror of the age, reflecting the abounding life, the wide, generous interests, the expanding intellectuality, and the eager questionings of the time.

And the important consideration is that this large body of dramatic literature, so tremendously significant in the quality and the quantity of it, is a product that developed on English soil, and owes relatively little to alien influences. On this account we should expect to find it, when at its best, true to those standards and ideals of life that have always been characteristic of the genius of the people at their best. And this is what the student of the Elizabethan drama does find. When life, and character, and human experience are presented upon the stage, one will not have to wait long to discover that here, too, are the eternal verities of the moral relationships and the abiding

presence of religious ideals. The materials may be far-brought from alien sources and remote ages —from Spain, France, Italy, ancient Greece and Rome, and the strange and distant East—but when it is wrought upon by the native English mind the central motives at work in the creation and development of character and the mimic procession of life that struts and frets its hour upon the stage are saturated with the familiar moral and spiritual inheritances.

To realize how essentially and profoundly this is true for the whole mighty group of the Elizabethan dramatists, one has only to remind one's self of the tidal forces that sweep through the plays of the greatest and most representative of them all—Shakespeare. That these forces are religious in their implications and conform to the accepted moral standards that have been developing through the centuries becomes impressively significant in that there could have been no intention to make them such. By no stretch of interpretation is it permissible to say that Shakespeare was at any time deliberately a moralist, a teacher of a code of ethics, or a revealer of religious values. He was primarily and all the time a maker of plays for public presentation, and was, therefore, chiefly concerned with the dramatic possibilities of life as he saw it.

Yet with equal emphasis it must be remembered that William Shakespeare was an Englishman of the sixteenth century, and was the unconscious

heir of all that lay behind him in the history of the folk to which he belonged, and by the divine right of his amazing genius the possessor of the stirring movements of thought and interest in the world around him. He could no more rid himself of his spiritual inheritance as an Englishman than he could of the physical blood of his ancestors, nor, being what he was, could he have escaped the influence of the electric currents that charged the intellectual atmosphere of his day, had he deliberately tried to do so.

Consequently when, by the very nature of his art, he selected out of the welter of human experience a short phase of life for objective, moving presentation, and breathed the breath of immortality into the creatures of his imagination, that organized scheme, with its scenes and acts, its plotted story, its characters, living, individualized men and women that they are, called the play, may be investigated to discover what are the motives, the principles, the standards, the ideals that direct and control in just the same ways as we investigate real life itself and for the same purposes. If from such an investigation, without undue straining to make a point, we shall find that here, in this feigned picture of life, the familiar moral and religious forces are present, we shall know that even Shakespeare, the most objective, the least partial interpreter of the meaning of human character in relation to its world, is faithful to the ideals and standards of the race.

Even in his history plays, where he would necessarily be more bound by the known limitations of his materials, where his presentation of life must be adjusted to accepted facts, Shakespeare really seems less concerned with the political movements involved than he is with the play of the moral forces, which, with a kind of fatalism, determine whether the issues of the political movements shall be destructive or constructive. In King John we have a King without character or principle, and on this account he moves irresistibly to his own doom and the humiliation of his people. Richard the Second is enamoured of the pomp and glory of royalty with no sense of moral responsibility for righteously and justly governing his people, and he loses his crown because of the fact that he used his high office for personal gain and not for public service. It was the character of the man that brought on the tragedy of his end rather than a combination of political forces. His successor, the great Henry the Fourth, held his crown by the right of might as he had taken it; but by virtue of the immoral methods of his attaining it, he was never at ease in its possession. In the development of his character throughout the two plays that bear his name, not one moment of outer peace and inner contentment is permitted him, and it is perfectly clear that we are looking on at the application of retributive justice—that what is wrongly got by "indirect and crooked ways" may not be held without pain and suffering, the worst

being due more to pangs of outraged conscience than to any outward combination of circumstances. The son Henry held the crown successfully, not because the soil of the getting of it had been wiped off by the father's death, but because in his character there were the highest moral and religious ideals. He who could see "a soul of goodness in things evil" would not enter even upon a French war without a solid basis of moral justification. The wild Prince Hal of his father's reign had been so "scoured of his faults" and "consideration had so whipped the offending Adam out of him" that his body had become a "paradise to envelop and contain celestial spirits." And one must feel that Shakespeare's emphasis is placed more upon the King's moral qualities than upon his qualities as a soldier and statesman. Indeed, without his high loyalty to religious and moral ideals there would not have been the superlative greatness of the soldier and statesman. In sharpest contrast is the dramatist's treatment of the tragedy of the reign of his son. Henry the Sixth might have been a saint, but he was too weak to control the accumulated forces of injustice and wrong that surged about him. It was the unrelieved immorality of political selfishness, of unscrupulous personal ambition, of civic crimes that led finally to national disunion and disaster until the hunchbacked figure of Richard the Third becomes the sinister symbol of a long period in the history of a people unredeemed by

any noble motives and untouched by any of those spiritual values that give worth and dignity to both public and private life. When, therefore, Henry the Seventh looks out over the blood-drenched field of Bosworth, he sees not only the vision of a united country after the exhaustion of a hundred years of internal strife, but the vision of a people purged of civic and social crimes by the pity and terror of tragedy. It is not only that political order has been reëstablished, but also that a wrecked moral order has been restored because the harvest of the whirlwind sowing has been reaped and atoned for, and upon the field of the nation's history there has been presented the moving, blood-stained panorama of the price of a prolonged infidelity to the austere and abiding realities of the ancient moralities of life.

If in his history plays Shakespeare, with probably no deliberate purpose and because he is unconsciously, as it were, the interpreter of the standards and ideals of his race, is so profoundly moral in his treatment of political movements, he is even more so when freed from the restraints which historical material might naturally impose. With him the tragic catastrophes of life impress with pity and terror, not simply because of some colossal disappointment of plans upon which happiness depends, or of the defeat of great hopes in which all future joy has been lodged, not even because of the humiliating fall of greatness from lofty position. Neither is

the awfulness of tragic consequences due to the despairing, hopeless struggle of men and women entangled in the meshes of a blind, ruthless, inexorable fate, nor to the inevitable providence of gods who for their sport make petty playthings of those who would live proudly and achieve greatly. These older sources of the tragic art do not seem to engage the genius of Shakespeare as he "holds the mirror up to nature and shows the age its very form and pressure." He is so deeply saturated with the Christian point of view to life and so completely the heir to the religious elements that had shaped the character and thought of the race that the supremely tragic forces of life as they affect both the individual and the social order to which he belongs are the forces of evil. There is not a single one of his great tragedies that does not trace the sources of the agonies of individual failure and the disasters of social wreckage to a violation of the moral order of the universe.

The forces of evil may be released either by the intentionally wrong arts of individual characters or even by intentionally noble acts. In either case, they work out destructively, involving the good and the bad alike. There are Macbeth and his wife, nursing together an unholy ambition for royalty until it grows from murder to murder. But the power and the crown they acquire are but a poor recompense for the consciousness of inner guilt, their exile even from one another, their loss of the love and trust of friends. She may wash the

stain from her hands, but can find no medicine for a mind diseased, while for him life becomes but a brief candle to be puffed out by any vagrant wind of chance, a poor player who but frets and struts his hour upon the stage, and the sum of it all is that it is only a tale told by an idiot. In the end for both physical death is a welcome release because each in slaying others had slain his own soul. As the tragedy moves toward its catastrophe one feels that he is looking on at the self-destruction of two human beings who wrought havoc with themselves and with their world because their motives of achievement had come under the control of the baser impulses of their nature. And the final results have about them the inevitableness of destiny—a destiny, however, not determined by forces outside the man and the woman nor beyond their management, but by forces of evil which they themselves permitted to become regnant in their purposes. The appalling consequences do not affect us with any suddenness of shock, but rather we should want explanations if they were otherwise. The tragic issues are just what would be expected when together Macbeth and his wife surrender their destinies to the direction of their lower natures, and it is not so much a poetic kind of justice which they receive as it is the inexorable working out of the processes of violated moral law. In this sense the play could be easily transformed into a sermonizing morality play, or used as a text for a homily—so thoroughly

is it in accord with even the conventional moral conceptions and religious thinking of the English past of which Shakespeare was the heir and of the day in the life of which he shared so vitally.

In *King Lear* the forces of evil are released with the best of intentions. The old King meant no wrong when he purposed to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. He may have been unwise and self-willed, even foolish to the last degree. He himself said in a moment of bitter agony, "He meant all for the best." But meaning all for the best does not always bring the best. It could not bring anything but the worst when the management of affairs falls into the hands of the two daughters Goneril and Regan. Perverted and debased, without kindness, with no moral sense whatever, out of their natures can only come influences that must infect the whole order of things with the poison of their characters, and there can be nowhere either right or justice but only an orgy of crime and wrong. As the play develops, with its accumulation of murders, its brutalities, we are aware of the sheer madness of human conditions and relationships that results when the forces of evil occupy the throne of power. There can be neither safety, nor order, nor happiness, nor security, for anything or anybody because the moral foundations of society have crumbled away, and there is nothing left upon which to stand. And once again the great interpreter of the meaning of life reveals his fellowship with those who were

before him in that he presents, at least by implication, the tragic significance involved in conditions from which have been excluded the sustaining, stabilizing, and directing power of a firm and just morality. It is not necessary for him to say this outright as the unfolding drama deepens from horror to horror until at last we stand in the presence of the dead old King to hear him who loved him most say:

> "Vex not his ghost; O, let him pass! he hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer."

The audience that saw it all understood that they were witnessing the human costs of the madness of trying to live outside the divine compulsions of love, duty, service, and loyalty to those nobilities that have their inspiration in religion, and we who read, with an instinctive response of approval, also have the same understanding.

In *Hamlet* we get, from another point of view, what happens when the moral equilibrium is thrown out of balance. In this play the tragic conditions, for which the individual chiefly involved is in no way responsible, are already established. Murder has been done by the King in order that he may have possession of the wife and kingdom of his brother. Surely, under such circumstances, there is much that is rotten in the State of Denmark, and this rottenness is deeper than the mere drunken carousals of the court. Wrong enough has been com-

mitted to render insecure the foundations of the social structure, and nothing will be settled until the evil forces thus started have wrought their full effects upon all concerned. They may be concealed and checked for a time, and may seem to be riding in proud and safe triumph. But they cannot remain so because the normal state of the universe is that of a moral order, and when it is once violently disturbed and pitched into confusion, things can only right themselves when the price has been paid in terms of sorrow and agony. Hamlet himself, intellectual, scholarly, profoundly spiritual, uncertain and hesitant, may dam and hold back for a while the pent-up forces of evil and cause the action of the play to move so slowly as to seem almost sluggish at times. This sluggishness, however, is only of the surface; underneath are the dark swirling currents of the sinister powers of life, gathering momentum with every apparent delay until at last they break over the barriers to engulf Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, the guilty King and Queen, and Hamlet himself in their black waters. And we know once again that the whirlwind sowing of sin has been reaped in an appropriate harvest of a tragedy that pierces the heart and wrings the soul because the religious sense and the moral conscience can conceive of no other outcome of such conditions.

Yet, when the appropriate harvest has been gathered, Shakespeare does not leave us in a world so shadowed with the awfulness of the de-

structiveness of the powers of evil that we are enveloped in an atmosphere of hopelessness, of despair, and of pessimism. With him it is not as if the forces that control the world of men and women are wholly malevolent, and are always combined in a sort of satanic conspiracy to make wrong and its consequences permanently triumphant. Far from it. In all his great tragedies, while the end is unforgettably terrifying in the picture of what life means when deep and soul-destroying wrong has its way, yet the final impression is one of purification, and we are permitted to look out upon a world that somehow has been washed clean of its stain because of the storm that has swept over it. Even deeper than this: the forces of good have asserted themselves and the powers that make for righteousness, having sat in stern, unbending judgment, have established a new order of things in which the moral equilibrium has been restored. With Macbeth slain, the old order changeth, yielding place to new, and the young Malcolm is crowned King of a better Scotland. When Albany turns to Kent and Edgar in *King Lear* to say,

> "Friends of
> My soul, you twain
> Rule in this realm and the good state sustain,"

one again feels that the atonement has been duly made, and that fortune's wheel has turned from the worse to the better. There is the same turning to a finer future in Hamlet. The beating of

young Fortinbras' drums heralds the dawn of a day that shall see no more

> "Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause."

Two star-crossed lovers lie self-slain in the tomb of the Capulets, and Romeo and Juliet had been brought there by ancient wrongs not of their own doing. But the curtain does not fall upon the unrelieved tragedy of such a scene. From it our thought is directed to a Verona redeemed into peace and good will because the love of these two was sacrificed on the blood-stained altar of old hates.

IV

HOMESPUN AND CLOTH OF GOLD

IV

Homespun and Cloth of Gold

If certain traditional religious conceptions and characteristic moral interpretations of life enter into the plays of Shakespeare to make the tragic issues tremendously impressive to the English audience that witnessed them in the last decade of the sixteenth and the first of the seventeenth century, they are in the plays because he was himself too essentially English to be able to look at life otherwise. There is no evidence, however, in any of his plays that he took at all seriously, or, indeed, was even aware of the growth of the Puritan movement that was soon to become so powerful as to close the theaters and win its complete triumph in beheading a king by "due process," if not of law, at least of parliamentary indictment, trial, and judgment. Already in 1604, twelve years before the death of Shakespeare, his first Parliament told James, in effect, that he was greatly mistaken if he thought that "The Kings of England have any absolute power in themselves either to alter religion (which God forbid should be in the power of any mortal man whatsoever), or to make any laws concerning the same—other-

wise than, as in temporal causes, by consent of Parliament." This "pack of Puritans," as the King called them, had begun a forty-year struggle for civil and religious liberty, and they only won the former by their unshaken fidelity to the stern austerities of their religious faith. It was not enough that they wrung from a reluctant King their Bible in 1611. Nothing less than the free right to interpret it as they willed, to live according to its rules as they understood them, and to conduct their religious worship and ceremonies in the way that any group might choose for itself, would finally satisfy them.

Therefore, underneath all the confused tangle of politics, of the contest of the people with the absolutism of the Stuart Kings that culminated in the Civil War and the protectorate under Cromwell, there is a religious zeal, a moral earnestness, and a passion to live the teachings of the Scriptures and to make them prevail in all human relationships such as the nation had perhaps never known before. Cromwell's army was invincible in battle because it was made up of men who "had the fear of God before them, and made some conscience of what they did." Their great leader, in the very midst of battle, could be heard saying, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered." Moreover he "made a halt and sang the 117th Psalm":

"All nations, praise ye the Lord; all ye people, praise Him,
For His loving-kindness is great toward us."

He himself said of his army, with a soldier's pride in its achievements: "Whenever engaged against the enemy, they beat them continually. And truly this is a matter of praise to God; and it hath some instruction in it—to own men who are religious and godly."

"Religious and godly"—these Puritans were, and "the people of a Book." To be sure they wrenched and twisted its meanings into all sorts of strange dogmas and doctrines and obscured its simplicities in the metaphysics of harsh theologies. Nevertheless, it became for the great middle classes, in town and country, the indispensable guide, comforter, and counselor, the most valued possession that time had brought them, their one standard of belief and conduct. Vaughan's well-known lines, in their perfect sincerity, express their attitude to the Book which had at last, through centuries of struggle, been made available for the use and edification of all:

"O Book! Life's guide! how shall we part,
And thou so long seized of my heart?
Take this last kiss: and let me weep
True thanks to thee before I sleep.

. . . .

Living, thou were my soul's sure ease,
And dying mak'st me go in peace,
And thy next effects no tongue can tell;
Farewell, O Book of God! farewell!"

The poetry of the gentle George Herbert, the inspiring appeal of Baxter's *Saint's Everlasting Rest,* and the eloquence of Jeremy Taylor's

royal prose in his *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* represent the sublimated aspirations of the more select and finer souls of those contentious and troubled days. But it remained for a man of the people, John Bunyan, humble tinker of Bedford town, to emerge from the jail—in which he had been immured for twelve years because, keeping faith with his conscience, he refused to muzzle his voice as a preacher of Bible righteousness—with a book in his hands that should become immediately and forever afterwards the spiritual epic, in homespun, of the plain people of his race. It may be that in it he was putting to record the agonies of his own inner struggles from the darkness of sin into the light of salvation. Nevertheless, the Puritan mood at once accepted it as of universal application—the intimate life story of every man who would find his way from the City of Destruction to the far heights where gleams the City of God. Besides, it was told in language so like that of the Bible and its thoughts were so essentially those of the supreme Book that they who read felt almost as if it were another Bible. Puritan Englishmen saw their own faces, heard their own voices, and recognized in the gripping realities of the teachings of the *Pilgrim's Progress* the religious standards by which they were trying to live with much agony of spirit and trial of soul in the midst of a perverse generation of evildoers.

But neither in thought, purpose, nor method was

Bunyan an isolated or new phenomenon in the history of English Letters. We need only to remind ourselves again that in the seventh century Cædmon, the herdsman in the cattle stalls, dreamed his vision of the marching hosts of Israel; that Cynewulf in the next century saw the shining glory of the Cross; that the sleeping Langland in the fourteenth century witnessed a fair field of folk, with all their sins and sorrows, on the Malvern Hills; that the morality plays presented on a rude stage personified virtues and vices; and that Spenser's Red Cross Knight, with all his company battling for Holiness against every manner of sin and error through the interminable labyrinth of the *Faërie Queene,* is but a vision spun out of the creative imagination of a genius of the Renaissance who brought rarely rich gifts of art and knowledge to the service of a spiritual purpose and the glorification of religious ideals.

And John Bunyan was of this company and lineage, only his art was more homespun than that of any of them and went farther and moved more hearts. This does not mean that the *Pilgrim's Progress* has any less of beauty than the other great spiritual allegories that have recorded, interpreted, and idealized the religious life of the race, but simply that its beauty was such that it touched the great common heart of man, affecting by its sheer simplicity and vivid reality alike the young and the old, the learned and the unlearned. Christian with his burden on his back is no un-

familiar abstraction, but a living character that somehow reveals the spiritual biography of all—at least of all who up to that time were bred of English stock and were the spiritual heirs of a great religious tradition. The Evangelist and those that met Christian along his sorely beset way—Pliable and Obstinate, Good-will and Help, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman and Legality, Faithful, the Interpreter, Mr. Greatheart, Mistrust and Timorous, Prudence, and Piety, and Charity, Apollyon with his fiery darts, and all the rest—represented with a vivid realism the foes and friends, within and without, that are the earthly companions of the human soul as it strives to walk the straight and narrow path upward through the Wicket Gate. Moreover, every soul finds all too often its Slough of Despond, its Cave of Sloth, its By-path Meadow, its Vale of Humiliation, its Vanity Fair, its Valley of the Shadow of Death, its Doubting Castle lorded over by Giant Despair, before it comes to a sight of the Delectable Mountains, and may enter in through the wide-flung gates of the Celestial City of Zion, where the Bright Ones are who wipe away all tears, and furnish crowns and robes of gold.

The stern religious earnestness of Puritanism and its absorbing passion for righteousness, fanned into an unquenchable flame by persecution and oppression, thus received immortal expression in this homespun prose of Bunyan—a prose, however, which at times shines like cloth of gold as it

reflects the glory of apocalyptic visions that now and again flooded the darkness of the Bedford jail. But Puritanism found another voice, fuller and more commanding, though far more limited in the range of its influence than that of Bunyan's—"the organ voice" of John Milton. No greater soul, no richer mind, no loftier idealism were ever anywhere at any time so completely consecrated to the service of the art of writing, and Milton was no less a Puritan than Bunyan was, and his aims and motives were as absorbingly religious as widely as they differed in modes of expression. Both were products of the same conditions and both knew, with all intensity of spirit, that nothing profiteth if a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul. With each this was a burning, a consuming passion, and the more or less artificial forms—the masque, the pastoral elegy, the epic, the drama—into which Milton poured his poetic genius could in no wise conceal the flaming religious earnestness of the man behind the art. If his soul was "like a star and dwelt apart," it was no doubt because of his uncompromising loyalty to the things which are spiritually lovely and of good report, and of an unalloyed devotion to the high majesties of religious thought and virtue. At any rate, to the service of such things he covenanted to bring all his powers and as upon a holy altar to consecrate his gifts of genius, art, and knowledge.

Consequently, even when writing a light

masque, a type of literature imitated from artificial foreign forms and used chiefly for the purposes of mere entertainment, Milton in his *Comus* transmutes it into the seriousness of a morality play, and it becomes an allegory of a faith that forever asserts the inevitable triumph of virtue and right. The unshaken conviction of the Puritan speaks in lines like these:

> "Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,
> Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled;
> Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm
> Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
> But evil on itself shall back recoil;
> And mix no more with goodness, when at last,
> Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,
> It shall be in eternal restless change
> Self-fed and self-consumed. If this fail,
> The pillared firmament is rottenness
> And earth's base is built on stubble."

And the masque closes with the song of the guardian Spirit urging:

> "Mortals that would follow me,
> Love virtue, she alone is free;
> She can teach ye how to climb
> Higher than the spheary clime,
> Or if Virtue feeble were,
> Heaven itself would stoop to her."

So sang the young Milton in the more or less untroubled days of his earlier youth. But as the years came and went, under the experiences of his gallant battle for faith and freedom his voice acquires a deeper note, rising in *Lycidas* to a flame of indignation against the forces of unrighteousness, as he sees "that two-handed engine at the door" standing "ready to smite once and smite

no more." And even at the end, himself beset by victorious enemies, the high causes for which he fought lost in the eclipse of defeat, encompassed by circumstances that gave every occasion for the despairing bitterness of heart-sick disappointment, his song in *Samson Agonistes* closes with the note of that triumphant faith with which he had begun life and which had been so profoundly characteristic of those who before him had handed on the torch of religion in the literature of the race. The blinded Samson had pulled down the temple walls and had met a common death with the Philistine enemies of righteousness. But in the thought of his father and of the Hebrew chorus all is well, and—

> "Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame; nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble."

In fact,

> "All is best, though we oft doubt
> What the unsearchable dispose
> Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close.
> Oft He seems to hide his face,
> But unexpectedly returns,
> And to his faithful Champion hath in place
> Bore witness gloriously."

All else that he wrote, however, were but by-products to the main purpose of his life. This purpose came fully to fruition in the *Paradise Lost* in those darkened years of his blindness and the tragedy of disappointed hopes for a fairer and

better world divinely ordered and administered. Over this theme his spirit brooded through the years of the Puritan struggle with a devotion as single as ever prophet prepared himself to hear the voice of God. In austere sincerity he could declare that he would not use the pen of a "vulgar amorist" or "riming parasite," but would come to his task "but by devout prayer to the Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." And it is in this mood that *Paradise Lost* was created and the theology of Puritanism clothed in cloth of gold. It was therefore no mere poetic exercise, but rather the sublimated essence of the statement of a stern and majestic creed for which men and women had suffered the fires of martyrdom or had eaten the bitter bread of exile in alien lands. Rightly is it called the Epic of Puritanism, and only the soul of the crusader for the things for which Puritanism stood would have dared to venture upon the theme with a prayer like this upon his lips:

> "And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
> Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
> Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread,
> Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,
> And mad'st it pregnant; what in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support;
> That, to the height of this great argument,
> I may assert Eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men."

V

SPIRITUAL IDEALS AND THE NEW DEMOCRACY

V

Spiritual Ideals and the New Democracy

When John Milton published *Paradise Lost* in 1667, the movement of which his life, character, and writings were the most adequate as well as the most noteworthy expression was worse than a spent force. Reactions had set in with the restoration of Charles the Second in 1660 that, at least outwardly, threatened to destroy the moral foundations of the nation. Religion became a reproach and a by-word, and public and private life cynically and shamelessly corrupt. People had apparently grown weary of the seriousness, the spiritual enthusiasms, the fierce zeal to conform conduct to the absolute standards of the Scriptures, the hard and narrow restraints that were placed upon the normal impulses of human nature, and had flung themselves into a sort of orgy of unrestricted license. Literature, naturally, could rise no higher than its source, and the re-opened theaters reflected the vileness of the life of the day, and its unabashed immorality walked and spoke upon the stage.

However, the conscience of the nation only slept. Negatively, at least, the great satirists sought to

waken it, and to keep alive a sense of moral values. As time progressed into the eighteenth century Addison, Steele, Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson, though perhaps touching only the surface of life and in no wise daring to penetrate into the deeper sources of its religious motives, by the method of satire—all too gentle, considering the conditions around them—did not let the nation wholly forget its infidelity to the moral idealism that characterized it in the best moments of its history. As mild and as superficial as their attacks were, yet they were significant of the fact that the light of the great tradition had not entirely gone out, and the scorching satire of Swift, burning deeper, was a sign that at least one soul was savagely indignant at the evil days that had fallen upon the world.

But all was not evil, and never is. There is usually a saving remnant of the righteous. The general corruption of the times probably left untouched no inconsiderable part of the lower and middle classes, among whom the moral standards and religious conceptions of Bunyan and Milton still survived in sufficient vitality to be stirred again into becoming a genuine force for righteousness. It is inconceivable that it should have been otherwise. These moral standards and religious conceptions had been too long controlling factors in shaping the character of the nation to go down into anything like a permanent eclipse. What they needed was only an appropriate stimulus again

to assert their transforming and directing power. Toward the middle years of this century this stimulus was found in the so-called Wesleyan Movement, and the latent religious loyalties awoke —in the familiar words of the historian Green— to "change the whole tone of English society. The Church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, and gave the first impulse to popular education."

Once again the nation is passing through a supreme historical crisis, and once again religion becomes the dominant influence as it always had been. Significant also is it that, now as before, the religious appeal is first to the heart of the great disinherited masses, and it is they who respond most profoundly to the transforming power of the Wesleyan Movement. But this power was not confined to them. It released ideas of life, conceptions of human relationships, and obligations to new duties that penetrated all classes of society. It assisted in the birth of a common sense of brotherhood, a sympathy with human deprivation and need anywhere, and a conscience that felt the compulsion of practical service. Of course, it had joined with it the great winds of idealism that swept out of France in the last quarter of the century when the heart of man

was hearing for the first time those hope-inspiring words: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Yet the ideals liberated by the French Revolution were largely political and practically destructive, while the Wesleyan Movement in its influence was essentially and primarily religious and constructive. It revived the ancient faith of the nation, gave the people a fresh grip on the Bible as the rule of life, united all in the conception of a common divine Father and a common brotherhood, and pointed to the practical duties that grow out of such a conception. A wide sympathy for the poor, the oppressed, the outcast gradually spread until humanitarianism became a kind of sentimentality. The cry of Langland on the Malvern Hills in the long ago was again heard in the land, but without the bitterness that went with it. It was rather of a love "in widest commonalty spread."

In the middle years of the century Samuel Richardson's three novels, *Pamela, Clarissa Harlowe,* and *Sir Charles Grandison* reveal that the tide is turning in the direction of a religious interpretation of life. His characters, as realistically individual as they are, are often no more than personified virtues and vices after the manner of the older allegories, and the author himself confesses that his purpose is to propagate through his novels the principles of the Christian religion. He always saw to it that virtue got its just reward and vice its adequate punishment. His moral emotionalism, the reality of his characters, his

minute revelations of the sentiments of the heart, his faith in goodness triumphant, caught the interest of his day as if he were giving men and women what they had long been waiting for in the midst of the dry, cynical, skeptical intellectualism with which they had grown wearied, and the result was that he became immensely popular among all classes. The significance of this is not so much that he created his own public as that he found a public already prepared for the kind of novels he wrote. Stirrings of that new moral energy that was only a little later to transform the religious life of the nation were beginning to freshen the tainted atmosphere of the times, and to cause a large and eager response to the too obvious presence of a definite religious purpose in the works of this Lincoln printer. To be sure, the religious element so obvious in the novels of Richardson was of too mild a quality to be particularly moving—at least as we read it at this distance—and it was too close to the merely expedient, prudential virtues to be compared with the tidal emotionalism of the Wesleyan revival. Nevertheless, hearts that wept so generously with Richardson were quickly and ardently accessible to the appeal of the latter when it did come in the fullness of its influence.

The poet Cowper, in a narrow and sincere way, so genuinely a forerunner of a great mood that was to spiritualize English poetry for the next fifty years, sings in perfectly clear notes, though

limited in range and of no great variety, the reality of the newer conceptions of life. God, man, and nature—God everywhere and in everything; man, simple, unspoiled by civilization and loved in a common brotherhood; nature, all growing things, plant and animal life, mysteriously yet intimately bound in a spiritual fellowship with human life—these represent the sources of the religion of this gentle, melancholy soul and are the inspiration for those kindly, gracious pictures that live in much that he wrote. "Pity," he himself says, "religion has so seldom found a skillful guide into poetic ground." This guide he wanted to be, feeling that,—

> " 'Twere new indeed to see a bard all fire,
> Touched with coal from heaven, assume the lyre,
> And tell the world, still kindly as he sung,
> With more than moral music on his tongue,
> That He who died below, and reigns above,
> Inspires the song, and that his name is Love."

Like Milton in his consecration, this humbler soul must have in truth been touched with a living coal from the altar to have given to the Church universal such hymns of faith and aspiration as, —"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," "There is a fountain filled with blood," "O, for a closer walk with God," "Hark, my soul! it is the Lord," and "Jesus, where'er thy people meet."

Common everyday folk, the homely virtues, the bare simplicities of life, the natural world with which and by which all must live, a sympathy

that begins to leave court and castle to take up abode in cottage and cabin, a sense of both the beauty and ugliness, the joys and the sorrows, the meannesses and the nobilities of the toiling masses of the world and a faith that for them a finer and a better day is coming, the presence in all and through all of the informing and directing Spirit of God—these are the warm and generous currents of thought and feeling that are furnishing a rich religious content to what is most significant in the literature of the particular period we are now considering. It appears in the grim, stark pictures of the tragedy of the lives of the lowly in the hard realism of Crabbe and sings itself in the lyrics of Burns—is in the homely beauty of the gentle pieties of the *Cotter's Saturday Night* and chants itself in the marching song of the brotherhood of man—

"Then let us pray that come it may
(As come it will for a' that)
That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth
Shall bear the gree' an' a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that."

The well-known lines from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner,* threadbare as they are from frequent quotation, sum up, as it were, no little of the religious mood that we have been discussing—

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

It must always be kept in mind, however, that the religious mood and spiritual ideals do not remain the same in the manner and method of their expression. Conceptions, moreover, of the meaning of religion, while holding to certain fundamentals of faith, change with time and circumstance. The mind of man forever faces the age-old mysteries of God, nature, man, his own soul, and how he should live and act in all those relationships which the conditions of his world force upon him. And these conditions are themselves in a constant state of flux and change through the centuries, with the result that the individual is never freed from the more or less painful processes of readjustment, of passing from the old to the new, of holding to somewhat of his spiritual heritage while he advances the banner of his faith to a farther outpost of religious conquest. He must acquire an adequate understanding of the changed and changing world into which he has come, and, should he have a message for it of authentic and commanding power, must speak it in appropriate language and form if he would be accepted in any way as the interpreter of his age. Those who from the beginning have carried forward religious ideals in English Letters have been under just this compulsion, and consequently could do no otherwise than express these ideals in terms of the thought, forms, speech, and experiences of their day. The wide liberal sweep of the New Learning and the militant religious intensity of the

Protestant Reformation met in Spenser's genius, and the *Faërie Queene* is the Christian's individual warfare against the evil impulses within his own soul and the forces of temptation without. John Milton's themes could be extracted from the golden wealth of stately and noble beauty which his poetic imagination conferred upon them, and made to appear no better than the drab dress of a narrow Puritan conception of life and the stubborn hardness of an outworn Calvanistic theology. The Slough of Despond, the House Beautiful, the Lions in the Path, the Delectable Mountains, the vision of the towers of the Celestial City of Bunyan's allegory will not be the same to him who seeks to voice the religious mood of the early years of the nineteenth century because a different world is in process of making from that in whose ways the burdened Pilgrim of the seventeenth century walked.

The nineteenth century, as significant perhaps as any other in human history, was heralded by a red, stormy dawn. As we have already seen, the Wesleyan Revival had stirred the English nation profoundly, and had awakened aspirations and hopes and created sympathies that transcended, in a conception of brotherhood, the artificial distinctions of rank and class. Out of America blew the strong winds of a new democracy builded on the theory of essential equality and of divinely imparted inalienable rights. It fanned into a flame of fury the people of France, and the

pent-up oppressions of a thousand years exploded into release in the blood and terror of the Revolution. Though in the end shocked by its excesses, yet the ardent, generous souls of the day thought they saw a new heaven and a new earth rising in gleaming splendor upon the ruins of the old order. They dreamed that the emancipation of the spirit of man was to be thoroughgoing and complete—industrially, socially, politically, and religiously. The institutions of the past—governments, economic systems, churches, creeds, schools—malevolent in their age-long influences, were to be recreated in the spirit of brotherhood for the beneficent service of mankind. In spite even of the sinister figure of Bonaparte marching in bloody conquest over Europe and threatening an imperialism as ruthless of that of ancient Rome, what was great in the literature of the day was essentially revolutionary in character because in the revolutionary ideals seemed to inhere the largest hopes of humanity—liberty, equality, and fraternity. Byron's strident energy and violent individualism and Shelley's rarefied dreams of a world wrapped in universal freedom and love are all on the side of these ideals.

But as far as England was concerned the menace of a purely political revolution was transformed into the fact of a deep and far-reaching industrial and social revolution due to the invention of steam and its rapid application to all the practical arts. The result was, a new and another

England was created—the England no longer of farmstead and hand-labor, but the England of the factory, the machine, and the crowded manufacturing centers. There are now the laboring classes, with all their injustices, their poverty, their discontents, their voices clamoring for redress and for their rights as men. The people are again hammering at the thrones of power because they themselves are conscious of their own power. The next step to religious equality is the demand for political equality, and England for a half century found itself in the throes of successive movements of industrial and political reforms that held within them the constant threat of violent revolution.

It is perfectly clear, therefore, that any religious interpretation of life that is at all faithful to conditions as they are and represents sincerely the underlying forces at work must be essentially social in character. Certain it is that the poet Wordsworth, who is, more than any other in this particular period, of spiritual kinship with the Cædmons, the Cynewulfs, the Langlands, the Spensers, the Miltons of the past, is both profoundly social and profoundly religious in his interpretation and presentation of life, and it is the former aspect of his message that accounts for the difference between the latter aspect from that of his predecessors in the great tradition. His ideas of God, man, and nature will therefore be less bound in definite credal limitations, but will

rather be wider, more pervasive, more liberal, or better, perhaps, more spiritual.

Like his predecessors, however, he had no hesitation in claiming a high mission for his art and in asserting, with something of the consecration of the prophet, that his function as a poet was that of the teacher, an inspirer of all who would live in the spirit. Over and over again in prose and verse he has stated this to be his purpose, and he never seems to have felt that the fact that he wrote with a specific end in view detracted in the least from the sheer beauty of his art, but rather that it was more beautiful because the purpose itself added dignity and worth to it. If Spenser sought in the *Faërie Queene* to fashion a knightly and noble gentleman, Milton to justify the ways of God to man, and Bunyan to plant the signboards along the steep and thorny road to the Celestial City, Wordsworth was also deliberately concerned that his verse should "console the afflicted; add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; teach the young and gracious of every age to see, to think, to feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." To this high service he devoted himself with unwavering fidelity, and to it he was wholly convinced that he was genuinely dedicated. It was the master passion of his life and to the very end he remained true to the vision of a certain unforgettable morning in his youth:

"The eastern sky
Was kindling, not unseen, from humble copse

And open field, through which the pathway wound
And homeward led my steps. Magnificent
The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front,
The sea lay laughing at a distance; near,
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds
Grain-tinctured, drenched in Empyrean light,
And in the meadows and lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a summer dawn—
Dews, vapors, and the melody of birds,
Laborers going forth to till the fields.
Ah! need I say, dear friend, that to the brim
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were made for me; a bond unknown to me
Was given that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit. On I walked
In thankful blessedness, which yet survives."

"A dedicated Spirit"—this is a matter deeper than an expression of merely personal egotism or, indeed, of a poet's more or less extravagant appreciation of the worth and dignity of his art. In this moment of high ecstasy when Wordsworth affirms, "I made no vows, but vows were made for me," he is as profoundly conscious of a divinely appointed mission as ever prophet was who accounted himself the very voice of God. Far from maintaining always the lofty flight which such a mood would inspire and often plodding prosaically along the dreary, dusty paths of the commonplace, getting lost in the sandy desert of metaphysical sermonizing, yet there never was a time in his long literary activity that he ever quite missed the gleam of his vision splendid and allowed the glory of the spiritual to fail, though distressingly intermittent as it was at times, to shed the light of a soul dedicated to the service of

the Soul of the universe. Disappointed as he might have been in the radiant hopes that flamed out of the Revolution only to perish in the disasters of the Napoleonic Wars and the advancing tide of materialism, showing now and again the thought and temper of a reactionary in the face of the uncertainties of the political and industrial movements that accompanied his years from maturity to old age—nevertheless, he kept faith through it all with those fundamental conceptions of life that set him apart as the poet of his day who most completely and most characteristically is of that great society of the noble living and the noble dead who keep burning the light of religious ideals.

And these ideals are not far to seek in the poetry of Wordsworth. They constitute the central unity of his thinking, and are the abiding inspirations of the noblest expressions of his art as well as the source of that power which his poetry at its best has to appeal to the imagination, the heart, the conscience, and the mind. That Wordsworth's poetry does this we have only to remind ourselves afresh of the familiar conceptions that give unity to the thought and passion of his most characteristic work. In the first place, and foremost, there stands out in his philosophy, if we may dare to say that a poet has a philosophy, a sense of the immanent presence of God in the universe—"a personal power resident in the world." Not, to be sure, as definitely stated as one would expect

in, for example, the case of Milton, but, nevertheless, the idea of God is never absent from the Wordsworthian mood—of God pervading, controlling, and directing all things, felt in the soul of man, making him one member of a spiritual "trinity—God, man, and nature." Too pantheistic perhaps this view is for the theologically minded who demand a sort of "yea" and "nay" statement of their faith, yet to the spiritual mystic (and most of us are that in certain elevated experiences of the soul) Wordsworth's conception, or rather mood, of the immanent presence of God in the world of men and things makes a statement of faith to which there is a deep, immediate assent or, better, confirmation. Those of mystic turn of mind and even those not so constituted, but are now and then aware of certain states of spiritual exaltation, do not need to have explained the meaning of those well-known lines from the *Tintern Abbey:*

> "And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things."

Vague and undefined this is, yet it must never be forgotten that there is always just this element in religion—an abiding sense of wonder in the

awful mystery of an encompassing, informing power in which we move and have our being in spiritual kinship with even the physical appearances and underlying forces of the material universe. So persistent is this mood or attitude that it seems as if it is a primary instinct of human nature resolutely refusing to detach itself from the vast, boundless life of a world in which God may be felt, if not actually seen, by the expectant, waiting soul. "No dry Christianity, parched by analysis and formulæ," cabined and confined in the narrow house of credal statements, will ever quite satisfy such a mood. It moves out of doors into the great wide spaces, to look into far horizons, and breathe the airs that are sweet and strong because they embrace all things that mind can conceive and imagination reach, halting only in the presence of infinite Power and infinite Love to make a supreme adventure, if not of understanding, at least of recognition. To this Shelley, with Wordsworth, bears witness, as rebellious as he was and as wildly hostile to all existing forms of religion—a witness to

> "The awful shadow of some unseen Power"

that

> "Floats though unseen amongst us—visiting
> This various world with as unconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower."

Again he has faith that his dead poet friend is made,

"One with nature: he doth hear
His part while the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull, dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear,
Torturing the unwilling dross that bars its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear,
And bursting in its beauty and its might
Through trees and beasts and men into Heaven's light."

Wordsworth, however, does not quite lose himself in the vague and empty inane as we know Shelley frequently does. Behind the indefiniteness of his consciousness of the presence of a "gracious spirit" that "o'er this earth presides, and o'er the heart of man," one cannot escape the conviction that there still remains no little of the ancient certainties of faith—in particular, that the power that controls the universe is a Personal Power directing all things toward beneficent ends. It was a faith of this kind that kept Wordsworth perennially optimistic in the midst of untoward and unhappy conditions—a faith that could make him say:

"Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes
Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up
Old ocean, in his bed left singed and bare—
Yet would the living Presence still subsist
Victorious, and composure would ensue,
And kindling like the morning—presage
Sure of day returning and of life renewed."

And yet more definite and sure is the thought that

"One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists—one only; an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er

Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power;
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good."

Such a thought mounts at times to the solemn exaltation of a prayer:

"Soul of our souls, and safeguard of the world!
Sustain, thou only canst, the sick of heart;
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto thee and thine!"

Out of a faith in a "Spirit that knows no isolated spot," that "circulates as the soul of all the worlds," Wordsworth accepts a spiritual comradeship with all living things and a sympathy as deep as life and as broad as humanity. He is the poet of the great, common heart of man and of a love that forever dreams and hopes for its complete reign on earth. This sense of spiritual kinship, together with a generous nothing-withholding acknowledgment of the essential worth and dignity of man as man and a passion that all the simple, fair, and noble things of life are not to be denied to any one, is the very breath of the New Testament and is a prophecy of a social order thoroughly Christian in its relationships. Everything is included in this spiritual kinship of his; not even the most insignificant is left out. For does he not say that he was "early tutored"—

"To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon the unassuming things that hold
A silent station in this beauteous world?"

But with him love was more than an "exquisite regard for common things," though at times one is almost led to think that Wordsworth's comradeship was chiefly with them, so very large a part do they play in much of his poetry. It swept, however, the whole wide range of human interests and becomes now and again a poem of love as the one force without which everything else is as nothing:

> "Life, I repeat, is energy of love
> Divine or human; exercised in pain,
> In strife, and tribulation; and ordained,
> If so approved and sanctified to pass,
> Through shades and silent rest, to endless joy."

Out of such an energy of love, strong, tranquil, pervasive, controlling, he dreamed for all an equality in the possession of the fair and noble things of life and nature, a spiritual democracy from which none shall be excluded. As "the infinite magnificence of heaven is for every human eye," "the sleepless ocean murmurs for all ears" and "the vernal fields infuse fresh delight into all hearts," so "gifts nobler are vouchsafed alike to all"—reason, imagination, "freedom in the will," truth, virtue, "the primal duties that shine aloft like stars," and "the charities that soothe and heal and bless" lie "scattered at the feet of man." Thus, the poet of "joy in widest commonalty spread" had a vision of the Great Society in which the things that are honest, and just, and lovely, and of good report shall rule over all and in all. He saw with a prophet's soul the years unfold;

"And changes wide, and deep, and silently performed,
This land shall witness; and as days roll on
Earth's universal forms shall feel the effect;
Even till the smallest habitable rock,
Beaten by lonely billows, hear the songs
Of humanized society; and bloom
With civil arts, that shall breathe forth their fragrance,
A grateful tribute to all-ruling Heaven."

Wordsworth had, moreover, a peculiar reverence for the simple, homely, austere, and to venture a seeming paradox, majestic virtues of life and character—duty, truth, faith, fortitude, sacrifice, service. No writer in the language has paid a more sincere homage to these fundamental things or so frequently has transmuted the drab colors in which they are too often clothed into shining gold and royal purple. The poet of the common life and of the common ways succeeded, in his best moments, by the magic of his art, in making both seem strangely and richly uncommon. Indeed, he dared to desire for his song an inspiration that would cause it to wind

"Through everchanging scenes of votive quest
Wrongs to redress, harmonious tribute paid
To patient courage and unblemished truth,
To firm devotion, zeal unquenchable,
And Christian meekness following faithful love."

It will naturally require an extra measure of poetic inspiration to lift such themes into the rare region illumined by the "light that never was on sea or land." It is also easy to plod along, slow-footed and drearily prosaic, even though the form be verse, when such themes are handled. More-

over, it is not easy to escape this deadly sin when the poet, nothing daunted, deliberately chooses to

> "Give utterance in numerous verse,
> Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
> And melancholy fear subdued by Faith;
> Of blessed consolations in distress;
> Of moral strength and intellectual power."

The significant fact is, for our discussion, that he did deliberately choose such themes, and in so doing he not only was holding aloft the standard of religious ideals handed on by his predecessors, but also he sublimated their apparently gray commonplaceness in the crucible of his art into something strangely fine. The homely face of duty never anywhere wears such a look of austere beauty as in this poet's *Ode to Duty*—"Stern Daughter of the Voice of God." "Stern Lawgiver" that she is, yet one acquires real liberty as one surrenders "The unchartered freedom that tires" for obedience to her divine behests, and in the act discovers that she

> "Does wear
> The Godhead's most benignant grace;
> Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon thy face
> Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
> And fragrance in thy footing treads:
> Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
> And the most ancient heavens, through
> Thee, are fresh and strong.
> . . . . .
> Give unto me, made lowly wise,
> The spirit of self-sacrifice;
> The confidence of reason give;
> And in the light of truth thy bondman let me live!"

This high strain, mounting with something like the inspiration of the prophet, rises to a lofty climax in the character of the *Happy Warrior,* he who

> "Labors good on good to fix, and owes
> To virtue every triumph that he knows."

Truly one sees in this poem "the light of the countenance of God shining clear in the face of duty," when the powers of the Happy Warrior

> "Shed round him in the common strife
> Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
> A constant influence, a peculiar grace;
> But who, if he be called upon to face
> Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
> Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
> Is happy as a lover; and attired
> With sudden brightness, like a man inspired."

VI

SPIRITUAL IDEALS AND THE NEW DEMOCRACY (Continued)

VI

Spiritual Ideals and the New Democracy (Continued)

Wordsworth's long life closed in the middle year of the century when the great Queen whose name is attached to a literary period even more significant than any other in the history of England had been on the throne for thirteen years. The Victorian Era, as it has been called, was crowded with "great issues, good or bad for human kind." The radiant dreams and shining hopes of the Revolution, while they yet gleamed in the thoughts of not a few idealistic souls, were subdued into a sort of afterglow of their former splendor. As life wore on, even Wordsworth, the creative consecration of that dawn in which

> "It was bliss to be alive
> And heaven to be young,"

having passed into a memory, became stiffly conservative in the presence of forces menacing in their promise of a confused and uncertain social order. The development of the mechanical arts, to which reference has already been made, went on in increasing power; commerce and wealth advanced amazingly, and harsh, hard materialistic concep-

tions of life threatened the destruction of spiritual ideals; the middle classes, influenced more than any other group by the changes involved, grasped the instruments and agencies of political control; poverty, bitter, sordid, and brutal, seemed to grow worse with the rapid and enormous increase of wealth, and the great masses of those who toil with their hands in shop and factory and on the farms were loudly clamorous for common rights and long-denied privileges to a degree that meant there must be reform and peaceful redress or violent revolution. The Victorian Era, therefore, was a period of prolonged social unrest.

The discoveries of modern science and the application of the scientific spirit and method to the facts and experiences of life contributed also to a disturbed mood of spiritual and intellectual unrest. The publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* precipitated the theory of evolution as a real issue in the religious thought of the day, and the old foundations of belief and the ancient creeds in which men had previously rested their faith were subjected to such criticism and examination as to drive some of the best minds of the time into doubt and uncertainty. Altogether, in spite of the romantic eddy back toward a medieval Christianity as represented in phases of the Oxford Movement, organized religion found itself on the defensive and hard put to it by foes within and without the pale to maintain itself as an aggressive force for the renovation and leader-

ship of a period sorely disturbed as to the direction toward which it was going.

In the midst, however, of both the social and intellectual unrest the commanding voices in the field of literature at least kept faith with the high moralities, were the inspirers of the souls of men, stood on the side of a social progress that must take into account the spiritual interests of humanity, out of a sympathy, deep and broad, gallantly led in the struggle for justice and privilege for the socially disinherited, and prophet-like refused to permit God to be exiled from the world of nature and of man. It is to be doubted whether, as a matter of fact, the literature of any period is quite so deliberately, and with such a strength of conviction and purpose, as profoundly spiritual as was the literature of the greatly troubled and tried nineteenth century. It might not be described as the Age of Faith, but it can be truthfully called an age in which the finer minds sought in all sincerity of soul to hold fast to the abiding realities of the things of the spirit, to assert the presence of a moral order in the universe, to discover and apply the principles of justice and righteousness, and to believe in the one increasing divine purpose shaping to noble ends both the spiritual and material concerns of mankind. As one considers the work of poet, novelist, and essayist from these standpoints, one will not have to go far to realize that religious ideals furnish them with their most genuine in-

spiration and are responsible for what in their achievement appealed most deeply to their contemporaries and for what has given it its most enduring qualities.

It may be that the novel, in some respects, is the most characteristic expression of the literature of the nineteenth century. At any rate, as an interpretation of life, manners, and character it developed amazingly during this period, and displayed such a sensitiveness to its moods and interests that one might read the history of the century in its prose fiction. Much of it, moreover, is directly related to the conditions of the time in that it has an underlying purpose of indictment and reform. Indeed, such a purpose is one of the distinguishing marks of the Victorian fiction. The novelist not only pictured the moving, complex panorama of the life of his day, but he also saw the wrongs and injustices that blackened and marred it, was indignant in his complaints, and passionately concerned for its redemption. The moral and religious motives, however, that will appear in his attitude to the world as he sees it will be discovered more frequently by indirect implication than by any direct statement of his adherence to a particular creed or doctrine. This does not mean, though, that he is not consciously or unconsciously holding fast to certain fundamentals of faith as standards of measurement for the meaning of life and the worth of character. For example, no man was less affected by the tre-

mendous currents of social and political change that swirled around him than was Sir Walter Scott, his interests being apparently only in the past. The picturesque strangeness and the romantic procession of the figures of a world dead and gone that caught and held the imagination of his readers far into the insistent, immediate realities of the Victorian Era seem, at this distance, curiously out of place in a day so deeply troubled with the problems of how to live in the present and preserve the social order from universal wreckage in the future. Yet even Scott had a "message," as it were, other than that of renewing an interest in the golden romanticism of the past in contrast with the drab-colored realism of the present. His novels were as clean in atmosphere as the winds that blew from off the peaks of his Scottish mountains, and his characters that won the sympathy of his readers "loved truth, and freedom, and honor, and courtesy." They were loyal to the abiding manly and womanly virtues—duty, fidelity, courage, and sacrifice—and thus, at least by implication, taught that yesterday, to-day, and forever, whatever the conditions of life, these are the foundations upon which any structure of character that endures must be built.

To such virtues also Thackeray pays unstinted homage, though at times it may seem that he does so by the negative method of picturing characters and conditions from which they are absent. Nevertheless, no sympathetic, understanding reader

of any of his novels can fail to realize on which side his heart and convictions are. The sub-title of *Vanity Fair,* "A Novel without a Hero," is significant in that it is a darkly drawn interpretation of a world—sordidly mean in the forces that control it and tragic in the final destruction of all happiness for those who live in it—of a world unrelieved by even a flavor of faith and religion and the virtues that normally result from them. The Lord Steynes, the Crawleys, the Becky Sharps, and the conditions that produced them have nothing heroic in them because they are barren of those generous impulses born of love, and honor, and duty, and service—the fine fruits of religious ideals working outwardly from character into life. When, however, high-hearted Ethel Newcome and the gallant Colonel Newcome walk their way of loving service through the pages of the *Newcomes,* we catch more than a glimpse of Thackeray's understanding of what gives dignity and beauty to human life and the satisfactions that are above and beyond either its joys or its sorrows. Satirist even to the point at times of cynicism, though he may have been, yet no one ever came away from one of his novels without an added hatred of the evil forces at work in character and conduct, an increased love for what is fine and noble, and a conviction that life is a terrifyingly tragic business and not worth the candle when the great virtues are absent.

Though George Eliot, in her thinking, moved

away from the orthodox conceptions of faith and the commonly accepted forms of organized religion, steadily adjusting her views of life to what might be called the more advanced scientific and philosophic thought of the time, still she hardly at all showed any change when it came to the interpretation of the ethical meaning of life. It was as if to the very end the evangelical training of her youth remained dominant, and she could not wholly escape its teachings in the matter of its unfailing sympathy for the poor and its austere scriptural emphasis on the terror of the harvest of sin, both in its disastrous practical results and in its effects upon the human conscience. Not even Wordsworth shows a more abiding love, a deeper insight into their lives, a more genuine sympathy with the plain folk of the land in their struggles than does George Eliot. Neither could a Puritan preacher of the days of the commonwealth, not even John Bunyan, paint in sterner hues the awfulness of the immediate and far-reaching results of sin in the lives of men and women, and, as for what love will do when handled by her, we need go no farther than *Silas Marner:* "No," said the old miser, "since the time the child was sent to me and I have come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now that she says she'll never leave me, I'll trusten till I die." Through all her works we might use as a formula for the interpretation of character and life a statement like this taken from *Felix Holt:*

"And there is seldom any wrongdoing which does not carry along with it some downfall of blindly-climbing hopes, some hard entail of suffering, some quickly-satiated desire that survives, with the life in death of old paralytic vice, to see itself cursed by its woeful progeny—some magic mark of kinship in the one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before and to the life that is to come later." And if in George Eliot the power that redeems life is love, human and divine, so the wages of sin is death, and whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap, and the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children to the second and third and fourth generation. Thus even the novelist of the nineteenth century sees life in terms of a religious faith and ideals as old as those of Cædmon.

If in the novels of Scott, Thackeray, and George Eliot moral principles that have been the outcome of the long saturation of the thinking of the English race in certain religious ideals appear as a sort of inevitable expression of their philosophy of life, and not so much with a deliberate purpose, there are other writers of fiction who were nothing less than propagandists in their desire to apply the truths of religion to the problems of life. Notable among these is Charles Kingsley, who with a passionate zeal was convinced that only a thoroughgoing application of the spirit and principles of Christianity could reconcile the differences between class and class and remedy social injustice

and industrial wrong. In *Yeast* he raises his voice in behalf of the agricultural laborers, and *Alton Locke* is a call to the Church to use the healing of its ministry to bridge the chasm between the upper classes and those who toil in shop and factory. The religious mood, the high spiritual idealism, the gallant faith in the transforming power of Christianity of both books, whatever the technical defects of their workmanship may be, give to them a nobility of expression and serve to place Kingsley in the great company of those who have thought it no degradation to use the art of literature to carry the message of religious truth to the hearts of men for the alleviation of unhappy and untoward conditions.

To believe in the worth and dignity of every man, particularly of those who are bruised and beaten by poverty and injustice down into the lowest levels where respectability never ventures, to find goodness blooming like a flower in the muck and mire of their lives, to have a heart prodigally tender with sympathy for them and a flaming passion for their betterment, to have a faith that never drags its wings in despair nor loses the hope that a God of love and goodness must somehow rectify the wrongs of the world and make all his children happy—if this is not religion, what is? Indeed, it is the very spirit of the New Testament, and it is also the spirit of Charles Dickens in his interpretation of life. In him the poor, the oppressed, the outcast found a friend

and advocate. Their woes became his woes, and he was not so much the apostle to the poor as he was the apostle of the poor. The law's delay, the brutalities of prison and workhouse, the oppressions of shop and factory, the cruelties of the schools, simulated virtue and sniffling hypocrisy masking meanness and vice, sordid baseness and low crimes lurking in dark corners and back alleys, the hideousness of slums where human nature, all distorted and perverted, hides, the sorrows of little children, the bitter tragedies of the humble—all this and more, with a realism unsurpassed, a bitterness of satire, a grotesqueness of caricature, a depth of moving pathos, and an inexhaustible richness of humor, he made the familiar possession of more readers than even Sir Walter Scott could gather to witness the stirring adventures of his noble knights and high-born ladies. But, moreover, with Dickens it was not mere entertainment he furnished, as great as this was. He caught and held both the heart and the conscience by his own profoundly sincere sympathy with all who were crushed beneath the weight of cruelly unrighteous social conditions and his obvious purpose that they should not continue because morally they ought not to. The result was that no man of his day did more to create a social consciousness, sympathy, and conscience that produced more reforms than did this man, with his literary evangel of love, faith, and hope in behalf of the weak, the poor, the oppressed. It was a genuine

social gospel that he preached, and it was more effective for relief and healing than the methods of parliamentary enactments.

And the sordid, bitter world of humble tragedies through which he leads us—do not the stars of the soul's undying faith shine above it? Poor Steven Blackpoole, in *Hard Times,* wronged on every hand, till to him, and us, in his own words, "Life is aw a muddle," lying in the depth of the pit into which he has fallen to his death, could find such a star: "In my pain and trouble lookin' up yonder —wi' it shinin' on me—I ha' seen more clear and ha' made it my dying prayer that aw th' world may on'y come together more, an' get a better unnerstannin' o' one another." And Dickens's own comment is significant of that atmosphere of hope triumphant that makes his novels spiritually so wholesome without even the slightest taint of the morbidness one might naturally expect: "The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer's rest."

Unfailing hope, a gallant optimism that never flagged, a faith that life's discords would one day be harmonized and that in the end good must triumph, and a prophetic vision of the immortal worth of spiritual sacrifice—these are what furnish the dominant mood that envelops much that Dickens wrote and lighten with a sort of radiancy what otherwise might be but gloom and shadow. Tragedy is everywhere, but it is tragedy relieved

of the horror that depresses because of the futility of human strivings and the final defeat of man's noblest endeavors—tragedy relieved by the sense that loyalty to the finer things of the soul ever comes to a victorious recompense. Unforgettable are the closing pages of the *Tale of Two Cities,* typical as they are of this spiritual wholesomeness of Dickens. Sidney Carton, poor wastrel that he is, nothing in his life became him so well as the leaving of it—laying it down for the safety and happiness of others. As he went to the guillotine, is it not permitted to believe that all the old error and vice of his life were quite cleansed out, and redeemed by the manner of his going for a rich service to the long future? "I see the lives for which I lay down my life peaceful, useful, prosperous, and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. . . . It is a far, far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known." And in preparation for a dream like this, are not the majestic words of the Scripture quoted by Dickens more than simply artistically appropriate? "I am the Resurrection, and the Life," saith the Lord; "he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

"They said of him about the city that night, that it was the peacefulest man's face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic."

VII

PROPHETS OF FAITH IN AN AGE OF DOUBT

VII

Prophets of Faith in an Age of Doubt

While with Scott the religious element may appear as no more than a sort of instinctive appreciation of the simple fundamental virtues of life and character, with Kingsley, George Eliot, and Dickens it is as definite as if it were intentionally introduced. Each interprets life and the conditions of their world in terms of familiar religious motives and principles. However, with the exception of George Eliot, none of the rest seemed to be profoundly moved by the more intellectual currents of the period. Not only was the thinking of men invaded and hard put to it for understanding by the constant threat of social revolution due to changing industrial conditions, but also the scientific method and spirit were even more disturbing and revolutionary in their influence. The mood of the day became critical and searching, and the older philosophies and faiths found themselves in the presence of new and radically different conceptions of God, nature, man, and his place in the universe. The scientific interpretation of life was well on the way even before the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin*

of Species in 1859, and when men like Tyndal and Huxley took up the cudgels in behalf of a geology that changed man's conception of the history of the physical universe and of a biology that taught the infinitely slow development of all life on this planet from the simpler forms to the higher until it culminated in man himself, there came a movement of intellectual and spiritual storm and stress unparalleled in English thought. It was a world in ferment, an era of painful and of tremendously significant religious adjustment. The ship of man's faith was sorely beaten and driven hither and yon by the headwinds, the cross-currents, and the deceptive eddies of moods and movements that nobody seemed quite to understand, and the captains had lost the compass and let loose the rudder, leaving the ship of faith to come to wreckage upon the rocks of a utilitarian materialism or a positivistic unbelief.

However, if the regularly appointed leaders of religious thought and the accepted representatives of organized, historical religion had failed of an authoritative and assuring message for the starving souls and confused minds of those who sought with anxious hearts for the eternal spiritual realities, there were prophets without the pale who kept the altar fires burning and the light of religious truth and vision undimmed in a world from under which the older foundations seemed to be crumbling. Not the least among these prophets was Thomas Carlyle. Prophetic he certainly was

both in the content and the manner of his utterance. Strange, grotesque, baffling to his generation, because he came, like a son of the wilderness, accusing, indicting, denouncing the shams, the quackeries, the shallow unbeliefs, the insincerities, the hypocrisies, the futile faith in social and religious nostrums, and in the very voice and habit of a seer out of the Old Testament clamorously called the world to an accounting with the ancient verities of the moral life that he thought were going lost in the vast welter of superficial legislative and ecclesiastical efforts at reform and in the hopeless jargon of a multitude of social and spiritual doctors with their worse than vain cure-alls for the evils of the day. With the authoritative insight, the flaming vision, and the savage wrath of a Hebrew prophet he shouted aloud his message of courage, sincerity, honesty, righteousness, duty, work, faith until finally the men of his day harkened to his voice—original not so much in what he said as in the way he said it—until he got a hearing and wielded an influence as wide as the circle of all who speak the English tongue. Men might differ as to the merits of the Reform Bill and the extension of the rights of suffrage, as to whether this or that panacea would remedy this or that social and industrial ill that threatened to turn the world topsy-turvy, the effects of the new scientific conceptions of life might vary greatly in their influence according to the varying nature of mind and temperament, what men might think of

the present duties and future destiny of the Church and of all forms of organized religion might offer differences as wide apart as the poles —but the Carlyle appeal, trumpet-voiced, sounded above the din, and confusion, and discords with at least the assurance that nothing could stand unless both the individual and the collective life were based on the ancient, familiar virtues of the race. On almost every page, whether it be history, biography, or essay, in language wild and grotesque in the strangeness of its rhetoric, stridently insistent as if it were a brand-new gospel freshly delivered from the divine Mind, he fairly dinned into the ears of men the old fundamentals of right and enduring living. The possession or the lack of these was the measure of the worth and worthlessness of individual character and of the social order's possibility of survival.

But with all his crying aloud for these moral simplicities, intellectually he apparently wandered far from the stern Calvinistic creed of his family and forefathers. His mind appropriated with a singular avidity the mystical transcendentalism of some of the German thinkers, and moanings over the grave of a buried orthodoxy are seldom absent from most that he wrote. However, after allowing for all this, one is aware that his spiritual and intellectual wanderings were in fact not so far from the inherited faith of his Scottish forbears but that, clothed in a wonderfully bizarre cloak, the creed of the covenanter looks forth with sad,

wrathful eyes upon a world gone astray with no pillar of fire or cloud to lead it into a promised land of religious safety and security. Does not a genuine Puritanism speak in words like these from *Sartor Resartus?* "For man faith is the one thing needful; how with it martyrs, otherwise weak, can cheerfully endure the shame and the cross; and without it, worldlings puke-up their sick existence by suicide, in the midst of luxury." "Has the word Duty no meaning; is what we call Duty no divine messenger and guide, but a false earthly Fantasm, made up of Desire and Fear? . . . Is the heroic inspiration we call Virtue but some passion: some bubbling of the blood, bubbling in the direction others profit by? . . . Thus in spite of all motive-grinders, and mechanical profit-and-loss philosophies, with the sick ophthalmia and hallucination they had brought on, was the infinite nature of Duty still dimly present to me; living without God in the world, of God's light I was not utterly bereft; if my as yet sealed eyes, with my unspeakable longing, could nowhere see Him, nevertheless in my heart He was present, and His heaven-written Law stood legible and sacred there."

The truth of the matter is, *Sartor Resartus* is a *Pilgrim's Progress,* different from that other one in that it is the deeper allegory of the mind's struggles through the storm of doubt into the haven of an assured faith. The question with Bunyan, because it was the question of his age, was

how to live; with Carlyle, it was how to think in the midst of the chaotic confusions of the modern world because this was the poignantly significant matter of the nineteenth century—how to think. From far other angles than those of the seventeenth or, indeed, of any other century, men were asking with anguish of soul for the meaning of God, man, and nature, and *Sartor Resartus* is their answer as it comes at last to the mind's Everlasting Yea of Affirmation—Carlyle's guide to the mountains from which the vision of the Celestial City may be caught. The pilgrim of the century wanders sorely beset by the tempter of unbelief, but finally is able triumphantly to assert: "Our wilderness is the wide world in an atheistic century; our Forty Days are long years of suffering and fasting; nevertheless to these also comes an end. Yes, to me was also given, if not victory, yet the consciousness of Battle, and the resolve to persevere therein while life or faculty is left. To me also, entangled in the enchanted forests, demon-people, doleful of sight and of sound, it was given, after weariest wanderings, to work out my way into the higher sunlit slopes—of that mountain, which has no summit or whose summit is in Heaven only!" Who shall say that we have not here again the old allegory of the soul's invincible passion to find the roadway that leads to God?

And the soul, looking even through nature, may at last find Him: "O Nature, . . . Art thou not the Living Garment of God? O Heavens, is it, in

very deed, He, then, that ever speaks through thee; that lives and loves in thee, that lives and loves in me? . . . Like soft streamings of celestial music to my too-exasperated heart, came that evangel. The universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with specters, but Godlike, and my Father's!" Stripped of the trappings of unfamiliar forms of expression there stands forth from such conceptions a faith in a God-informed and a God-governed world as definite as that of Puritanism itself, with an added sense of the divine dignity and worth of what is essentially spiritual in man of which Puritanism at its best did not even dream. Against the materialism of the day and any thought that the new science might offer to make man but a creature of merely physical impulses or to degrade him to the level of a being controlled by brute instincts, he marshaled with the fervor of a crusader all his arts of denunciation and satire. Man to him, however low he may have fallen from his high estate, remained forever as one allied in nature to God and seeking always to struggle upward to discover his best in a revelation of the divine. "What is man?" he asks in a memorable passage in *Sartor Resartus,* and his answer is: "A soul, a spirit, a divine apparition. Round his mysterious Me there lies, under all those wool rags, a garment of flesh (or of senses) contextured in the Loom of Heaven; whereby he is revealed to his like, and dwells with them in union and division; and sees

and fashions for himself a universe, with azure Starry Spaces, and long Thousands of Years. Deep-hidden is he under that strange garment; amid Sounds and Colors and Forms, as it were, I walked, swathed in and inextricably overshrouded; yet it is sky-woven, and worthy of God. Stands he not thereby in the center of Immensities, in the conflux of Eternities? He feels; power has been given him to know, to believe; nay, does not the spirit of Love, free in its celestial primeval brightness, even here, though but for moments, look through? Well said Saint Chrysostom with his lips of gold, the true Shekinah is man. Where else is the *God's-Presence* manifested, not to our eyes only, but to our hearts, as in our fellow-man?"

Beneath the almost always denunciatory mood of this Victorian prophet of the things of the spirit—a mood that makes no concealment of his contempt for the democratic equalities of the day—there is present a throbbing, moaning sympathy with all the struggling sons of men and a passion that each should have his chance, according to his ability, at the good and fair things of life. Moreover, there is in the characteristic Carlyle mood not only this sense of infinite pity, but also an insistence upon a common life only satisfying as it sets its aims upon spiritual values. One remembers what titanic contempt he pours upon any theory of happiness or of physical well-being offered by Europe's "Finance ministers and

upholsterers and confectioners." In the face of all of them he dares to say that "man's unhappiness comes of his greatness," and "it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the finite"—that they are not able "to make one shoeblack *Happy.*" It was to preach this gospel of a "higher in man than a love of happiness" that the "sages and martyrs, the poet and the priest, in all times, have spoken and suffered; bearing testimony, through life and through death of the Godlike in man, and how in the Godlike only has he strength and freedom." In such a conception he lifted his brother man upon the high table-lands where the tonic airs of the spirit come as a divine healing to his materialistically sick soul, enabling him to realize his essential dignity and worth and destiny, and to glimpse the meaning of a conception like this: "On the roaring billows of Time, thou art not engulfed, but borne aloft into the azure of Eternity. Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the "*Everlasting* Yea, wherein all contradiction is solved: wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him."

It would not be difficult to translate such appeals and that philosophy of life that binds into an essential unity of thought much of Carlyle's many-voiced comments on the world of men and things into the quite familiar language of a conventional religious phraseology as old as the religious thinking of the race. The truth is, he never quite

emancipated himself from his spiritual inheritance in the hurly-burly of the intellectual storms of his day, however obvious may have been his angry impatience with its apparent futility and lost vitality in the presence of a world sick with cant, and sham, and quackery, and hypocrisy. Nowhere more clearly does it appear that the dead hand of the past is really a living hand controlling his attitude and furnishing standards of judgment than in his interpretation of human character and history. For him justice and righteousness are the majestic laws of the universe, and they will rule though the heavens fall. When men and nations violate them they pay the price with the tragic precision and certainty of predestined fate. To lose faith, to forget God, to disobey the eternal laws of honesty, truth, sincerity, duty, right—this is the sure road to disaster and tragic ruin. Behind the "desperate confused worldwide entanglements" of his day he saw "eternal justice" differing from "momentary expediency"—"Justice, radiant, beneficent, as the all-victorious light element," but, "if need be, an all-victorious fire-element" that "melts all manner of vested interests, and the hardest iron cannon, as if they were soft wax, and does ever in the long run rule and reign, and allows nothing else to rule and reign." Indeed, what is his marvelously dramatic, flaming picture of the French Revolution but a wild panorama, seen in the conflagration of a world on fire, but an indictment of

the accumulated national sins of a thousand years and a judgment therefor in the terror and horror of a Revolution that had to be an atonement for age-old wrongs? If one could imagine a prophet of the Old Testament transplanted into the nineteenth century, would he not have told the story in very much the same way?

We should have to imagine something else than the passion and methods of the Hebrew prophet when we consider Carlyle's great disciple, John Ruskin. While there would be in him the same depth of moral earnestness, the same standards of spiritual judgment, yet the many-sidedness of Ruskin's genius, a certain exquisite tenderness of temperament, and a sort of soaring radiance of idealism when it came to the application of his theories to the conditions of modern life—set him apart with those few prophets of the new day that dared to dream that the principles of the New Testament were meant to be the practical working forces of the whole of life. Was there ever another like him? A Puritan in his fidelity to the austerities of morality, scientifically-minded in his powers of observation, an artist to whom all beauty was holy and all ugliness vile, an evangelist of goodness and fairness whose zeal was a consuming flame, a soul out of the Middle Ages, a Saint Francis of Assisi, whose love brought God's universe of men and things into the comradeship of a passionate tenderness—he was dowered with a gift of utterance that sings

its message in the noble tones of a great symphony. Upon such a combination of extraordinary genius the moods and movements of the century lifted their waves of threat and change—industrial, political, scientific, and religious, and yet he kept faith in his thinking with the everlasting verities of the spiritual realities as if called of God to win a lost world back to the only things that give worth to human life and security to its progress.

With the gallantry of a knight-errant and the soul of a crusader he battled with the forces of his day, and without offering quarter sought to slay them as if they were but dragons of the slime. To reduce nature to the office of a common drudge for the service of man, to mechanize industry with steam, to hide the sky with the smoke of factories, pollute the streams with their waste, and to cover the landscape with the ugliness of the manufacturing village, was to him a profanation of a world that God meant to be not only beautiful but holy in its beauty because through it He revealed His own majesty and power. No man in all the history of English Letters, not even Wordsworth, approached the natural world with Ruskin's mood of appreciation of its beauty and reverence for its spiritual significance and suggestiveness. It was to him the veritable garment of God, a holy symbol through which are revealed the processes of His purpose, and a Bible in which the open soul might read His thoughts. Not only to his own

generation, but to all successive generations will this physical universe with which man is so subtly and mysteriously related be infinitely rich in spiritual meaning because Ruskin resolutely refused to permit a mechanical, scientific civilization wholly to destroy its loveliness and take from it its soul. The purple glory of his style never dazzles with its splendor anywhere quite so much as when he is thus interpreting the spiritual significance of the material universe into which science was peeping and prying with eyes too small to discover aught else but the automatic laws of its processes. A sheer religious passion lifts his prose into companionship with that of the singer of the Psalms when he sees the firmament as showing forth the handiwork of God. Did ever another bring the thought of men closer to the profound spiritual intimations of nature than did Ruskin in passages like this: "And in this tabernacling of the unendurable sun with men, through the shadows of the firmament, God would seem to set forth the stooping of His own majesty to men, upon the throne of the firmament. As the Creator of all the worlds, the Inhabiter of Eternity, we cannot behold Him; but as the Judge of the earth and the Preserver of men, those heavens are indeed His dwelling-place. 'Swear not, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool.' And all those passings to and fro of fruitful shower and grateful shade, and all those visions of silver palaces built about the

horizon, and voices of moaning winds and threatening thunders, and glories of colored robe and cloven ray, are but to deepen in our hearts the acceptance, the distinctness, and dearness of the simple words, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' "

In a variety of ways and from almost every conceivable standpoint Ruskin thus interprets the meaning of the beauty, the aspects, the processes of the world of nature, symbolizing it all into parables of spiritual truth speaking to the soul of man if his eyes have not been blinded by the dust and his ears deafened by the noises of a day with whose movements Ruskin was uncompromisingly at war. In his interpretation of the principles and history of art he was also as profoundly and as militantly religious as he was in the interpretation of nature. Unmeasured contempt he heaped upon any form of art that was a revelation of anything less than that of a "great and good human soul." Manual dexterity, however fine, and the products of "those small dexterous creatures" who were concerned not with what they did but with how they did it, got from him nothing but vitriolic scorn. The key, he says, for the interpretation of the art of all time is found in this principle: "Whatever may be the means, or whatever the more immediate end of any kind of art, all of it that is good agrees in this, that it is the expression of one soul talking to another and is precious according to the soul that utters it." From this standpoint, "the dark stones that have so long been the sepul-

cher of the thoughts of nations, and the forgotten ruins wherein their faith lay charneled, give up the dead that were in them; and beneath the Egyptian ranks of sultry and silent rock, and amidst the golden lights of the Byzantine dome, and out of the cold confused shadows of the Northern Cloister, behold, the multitudinous souls come forth with the soft eyes of newly comprehended sympathy and stretching their white arms to us across the grave, in the solemn gladness of everlasting brotherhood."

An everlasting brotherhood of great and good human souls clasping hands across the centuries—this, then, is the evangel of the enduring element in all the arts—music, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture. The quality of any artistic production, therefore, gets its value from the sheer moral worth of the individual soul of which it is the sincere expression. Speaking of music, for example, Ruskin says: "All right human song is the finished expression, by art, of the joy or grief of noble persons, for right causes"; and further, let a man's "art-gift be never so great, and cultivated to the height by the schools of a great race of men; and it is still but a tapestry thrown over his own being and inner soul. And the bearing of it will show, infallibly, whether it hangs on a man, or on a skeleton. If you are dim-eyed, you may not see the difference in the fall of the folds at first, but learn how to look, and the folds themselves will become transparent and you shall see

through them the death's shape, or the divine one, making the tissue above it as a cloud of light, or as a winding sheet."

But more significant even than his application of moral principles to the character of the individual artist to assure a lasting nobility to his work is Ruskin's insistence upon the conception that the "art-gift itself is only the result of the moral character of generations," and that it is only "perseverance in rightness of human conduct that renders, after a certain number of generations, human art possible." Over and over again with burning vehemence he thus affirmed that there could be no great and noble art except as those who produced it were themselves great and noble and surrounded by conditions conducive to beauty of living and fineness of character—great and noble not for one generation only, but through many generations. This conception of the sources of creative art he held because he believed not only in the beauty of holiness but also in the holiness of beauty, that these two could not be divorced except to the sore hurt of both. It is no wonder, then, that when he directed his eyes and thought upon his own England and saw the nature of the transformation a mechanical civilization had wrought in the lives of the people and their ways of living, it seemed to him all vileness and ugliness, and the artist soul within as well as the loving heart turned from the interpretation of art to the high duty of trying to right the wrongs

and change the whole social order according to the truth and spirit of the New Testament.

This duty he performed with the consecration of one under the compulsion of an inspiration that would not let him turn aside in the face of the marshaled forces of the accepted social and economic leaders. They might call his theories the wild ravings of a madman, the dreams of a fanatic, or at best the shining visions of an impossible idealist. Nevertheless, beneath his radiant prose, and but poorly concealed by flashing paradox and extravagant ridicule, there is the steady passion for justice, righteousness, and the peace that can only come when love is the final law of human relationships, and reverence for and obedience to the high majesties of the ancient moralities rule the social order. May not the essence of all his social thinking and the very basis of the message he had for his day be found in the creed he furnished for his St. George's Guild?

> I trust in the living God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things and creatures visible and invisible. I trust in the kindness of His law and the goodness of His work. And I will strive to love Him, and keep His law, and see His work while I live.
>
> I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, the fullness of its mercy, and the joy of its love.
>
> And I will strive to love my neighbor as myself, and, even when I cannot, will act as if I did. . . .
>
> I will strive to raise my body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness; not in rivalry or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honor of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.

Here, compressed into the short space of a few words, is what this prophet of the spirit en-

deavored, with a rarely rich magic of phrase, to get into the mind and soul of his generation. Stated thus in its bareness, it seems not at all strange in its thought, but is rather as familiar in conception as the source from which it is drawn—the Book which, through all the centuries, has nourished the moral life of the English people and has been the inspiration of most that is noblest in their literature. Over and over again Ruskin confessed to the influence of the Bible on his own style and thought, and it is everywhere patent that, as in the case of Carlyle, its moral and religious standards, unconsciously perhaps, furnish the principles for measuring the worth of life and testing the soundness of conditions in all their relationships. So thoroughly is his thinking saturated with Biblical ideals that his modes of expression take on their very manner, and in the jangling confusion of the century it was almost as if men heard again another St. John visioning a more blessed spiritual order: "And so, out of the true earthly kingdom, in the fullness of time, shall come the heavenly kingdom, when the tabernacle of God shall be with men; no priest needed more for ministry because all the earth will be temple; no bread nor wine needed more for mortal food, or fading memory, but the water of life given to him that is athirst, and the fruits of the trees of healing." And so John Ruskin takes his place in the company of those who are "the inspirers of all who would live in the spirit"—a messenger of faith, and hope, and love.

VIII

PROPHETS OF FAITH IN AN AGE OF DOUBT (Continued)

VIII

Prophets of Faith in an Age of Doubt (Continued)

With all their vehemence of assertiveness, their tenacious holding to spiritual values, their insistence upon the fundamentals of the enduring moralities, and their faith, if not in religious orthodoxy, at least in a divine order in the world, it is perfectly clear that both Carlyle and Ruskin suffered severely in the effort to adjust themselves intellectually to the shifting movements of the period. That each maintained such an unshaken fidelity to the familiar verities, is all the more impressive when one considers the strain to which each was thus subjected, and their worth as spiritual leaders is all the more enhanced when the forces that made for a materialistic interpretation of life are kept in mind. It is necessary to recall again that the rationalism of the Eighteenth Century, of which Paine's *Age of Reason* is a typical representative, still lingered on, and a hard utilitarianism exercised an influence that tended to materialize man's thinking about the worth and meaning of human life. Upon the minds of many there settled the chill of a world

from which the soul had vanished and the blight of a pessimism that could grow none of the flowers of the hopes once inspired by religious faith.

Then, there came the revolutionary influence of science—particularly the sciences of geology and biology. Science not only widened immeasurably the bounds of knowledge, literally creating a new universe for men to walk in and think about, not only added immensely to the conveniences and comforts of life, and transformed the whole economic and industrial order, with corresponding social changes, but it also made necessary a fresh philosophy for the explanation of all things. In particular, the field of religious thought was invaded by conceptions of the physical universe and of man's place in it and relation to it that forced organized religion to justify itself anew to its generation and to enter upon an examination of its very foundations. To be told by geology that the world was no fiat creation of deity, but the infinitely slow, orderly process of millions of years, and that the record could be read in the rocks, to hear from biology that all living things, beginning with a microscopic cell of life, developing through the centuries, finally culminate in man, and to be informed by all the sciences that everything is under the reign of unvarying, inexorable, universal law—seemed to be reducing the world to sheer matter, and to be either eliminating God from it, or conceiving Him as an absentee God sitting in some remote corner, watching dis-

interestedly the wheels of the mighty machine go round. As a result of such views, men felt themselves in the fell grip of a materialism in which there was no room for the soul, and doubt and agnosticism, deadening to all generous spiritual aspirations, bewailed a lost faith and a banished God. With Matthew Arnold some of the very finest minds of the day could only say:

> "The sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round Earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long-withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world."

"Faith retreating to the breath of the night wind —for this mood and everything that caused it the message of Carlyle and Ruskin was as a tonic to the souls of men, holding them steady to a belief in the efficacy of the spiritual verities while all else about them was slipping and insecure. Of the same virtue were the messages of the two supreme poetic voices of the period, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. They also are prophets of the kingdom of the spirit who served to keep God and soul as realities in a twilight of religious thinking that threatened to become a night with no fixed stars of faith shining to guide the soul in the devious and unfamiliar ways into which the world was moving. Each spoke in his own characteristic manner, and widely different

as they were in point of view and mode of expression, yet there was never any question about where each stood as to the supremacy of spiritual values and the necessity of building the towers of both the individual and the collective life upon them. Indeed, it would not be a difficult matter to prove that, while each showed definitely on every page that he felt the strain of the religiously disturbing forces about him, both at bottom remained through it all almost orthodox in their religious conceptions and in their interpretation of the things that give worth, and dignity, and lasting satisfaction to life. In a word, these two, upon whom the intellectual storm of this significant period clearly beat with all its fury, still spoke a message that served to hearten and strengthen men in their faith, not so much because it was new as because, throbbing and vital with modernity, it kept alive the familiar beauty and power of even the older conceptions of religion. And the important thing to remember is that Tennyson and Browning were the major voices of the Victorian Era in the sense that they were heard more widely and more understandingly simply because they seemed to express more nearly than any others the spiritual traditions and ideals with which the race was familiar.

One need not go farther than a few of the best-known poems of Tennyson to realize how essentially true this is—those poems which, in a finished perfection of form, make him seem rather

the flawless artist in words than the profound interpreter of ideas. In fact, that he was a profound interpreter of ideas has been denied, and there have been those who have dared to describe him as a second-rate mind with a first-rate gift of expression. A typical example of this estimate of Tennyson may be found in Frederic Harrison's comment on the *Two Voices,* in which he refuses to allow any originality of ideas to the poem: "The ideas are those which have been worked out in a hundred sermons and essays by able men who, feeling the force of many unsolved problems of metaphysics and science, still would find æsthetic, moral, and psychological grounds for 'faintly trusting the larger hope.'" Moreover, Harrison further says that this "larger hope" of Tennyson's in an age of doubt was indefinite enough to give a kind of assurance to many types of mind. "Orthodox Churchmen say this larger hope is to be found in the Anglican Prayer Book; orthodox Methodists say it is only to be read in the Bible; Catholics say it is the living voice of the Church; broad Churchmen find in it various beautiful and somewhat nebulous visions." However just such criticisms of Tennyson may be, the fact is, they but emphasize the point that one phase of the influence of his message was due to his at least attempting to keep burning the ancient fires of the familiar, fundamental religious conceptions.

Consider, for example, the *Two Voices,* the

poem with which Harrison illustrates his criticism of the thought of Tennyson. There is nothing new in the question raised—whether after all life is worth living. Long ago the heathen Saxon priest raised the same question in the flight of the sparrow through the warmth and cheer of the mead hall. From the winter darkness he came and into the winter darkness he went, flitting but for a brief moment in the light of the hearth fires. What is the *Two Voices* but another parable of the worth and meaning, and mystery, of human life—a parable, however, that is heavy with the accumulated experiences of the race and complicated with immense additions of knowledge and the philosophies which these additions necessarily inspire? Life—it is of so brief a span that all achievement is relatively small; virtue, duty, hope, ambition—these are not of the spirit, but are only stirrings of the blood; the search for truth, of what worth? For the little that we find only reveals more distant peaks shrouded in mists; nothing is certain except death, and the mysteries of the eternities before and after remain unsolved. Such questions as are here suggested are the old spiritual inquiries of the mind of man offered afresh under the strain and test of new conditions, and the attempted answers differ chiefly in the phraseology in which they are expressed and not in their essential ideas. For it is faith after all, not reason, upon which the spirit rests in trying to solve the riddle of life—but a nineteenth-century

faith struggling to find its way through the half lights of an unfamiliar interpretation and therefore not quite sure of itself. Under such conditions man

> "Seems to hear a Heavenly Friend,
> And through thick veils to apprehend
> A labour working to an end.
>
> The end and the beginning vex
> His reason; many things perplex,
> With motions, checks, and counter-checks.
>
> He knows a baseness in his blood
> At such strange war with something good,
> He may not do the thing he would.
>
> Heaven opens inward, chasms yawn,
> Vast images in glimmering dawn,
> Half shown, are broken and withdrawn.
>
> Ah! Sure within him and without
> Could his dark wisdom find it out
> There must be answer to his doubt."

The sabbath dawns, bathed in soft airs, and sweet with the peal of chapel bells, and a heavenly-toned voice touches the heart "like a rainbow from the shower," and causes it

> "To feel, altho' no tongue can prove,
> That every cloud, that spreads above
> And veileth love, itself is love."

And thus at last hope weaves a rainbow of promise, and faith senses love behind all the confusing tangle of reason's teasings to discover the mystery of God, and personality, and the worth of the individual life, and the Pilgrim's Progress leads once more to the spiritual consolations for which the Church has stood in all the ages.

But other questions than the ancient one of the meaning and worth of life had also to be faced in the light of the new knowledge and of the new philosophy. If the old faiths go down in the general crash of existing systems of thought, how valid are the inherited moral conceptions and sanctions? Right and wrong, evil and goodness, sin and virtue—forces forever struggling for the mastery in the heart of man—what happens to one's understanding of the meaning of these if science accounts for them on a purely materialistic basis, and either makes God unnecessary in the moral order of the universe or banishes Him into voluntary exile as a sort of ironic onlooker at the havoc man works upon himself and his world? What is sin? A heat in the blood, a twist in the brain cells, an error of judgment, a social wrong, a remnant of the brute surviving in the human? Are virtue, conscience, duty but accumulated memories acquired somehow in man's long evolving climb out of the ooze of his protoplasmic beginnings until he reaches the height where reason affirms that he must respect and obey these impulses because experience has proved them to be useful? And God himself—is he not an age-long composite of immemorial fears and terrors, the creation of successive dreams of ancestral imaginings holding no relation, except in the mind that made Him, to what are called the spiritual aspirations and values of life?

Such questionings suggest the Wicket Gate

through which the Pilgrim of the nineteenth century must fare forth on his Progress. In the *Vision of Sin* the poet reveals the nature of the pilgrimage when evil is Lord of Life—its sordid hideousness recorded in a grim, stark realism rather unusual with Tennyson. The youth who rides so gallantly in the beginning

> "A horse with wings, that would have flown,
> But that his heavy rider kept him down,"

becomes in the end

> "A grey and gap-tooth'd man as lean as death,
> Who rode across a wither'd heath
> And halted at a ruin'd inn."

To him the wages of sin are disenchantment, the loss of all faith in the fair and noble things of the spirit, and the dimming and tarnishing of the ideals that furnish worth and dignity to life. Name and fame, virtue, freedom, progress, visions of the perfect state, love, God—these are but empty words to beguile fools with, and so the song is:

> "Drink to Fortune, drink to chance,
> While we keep a little breath,
> Drink to heavy Ignorance!
> Hob-and-nob with brother Death!

Thus are the wages paid; the soul that sinneth dies; and the ancient majesties of the moral law exact their vengeance upon the transgressor, and upon the slope of the mystic mountain a voice cries—

> "To the summit, 'Is there any hope?'
> To which an answer pealéd from that high land,
> But in a tongue no man could understand;
> And in the glimmering limit far withdrawn
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn."

And so faith affirms that somewhere in the shadow there is still a God of righteousness at least taking account of the presence of evil in the world and of the hideous tragedy of the ruin wrought by it, though He may not have made quite clear why He allows it to exist in the heart of man.

The *Idylls of the King* are not merely the retelling of the ancient tales in modern dress; they are obviously, at least in part, allegorical, and, as the poet himself says, are

> "New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul
> Rather than that gray King, whose name, a ghost,
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak."

"Shadowing sense at war with soul" is thus the fundamental theme of Tennyson's interpretation of the King Arthur stories as it is the theme of the *Vision of Sin*. Perfect was the fellowship of the Table Round until Evil entered, and then all its fair beauty was soiled, and the foundations crumbled from beneath the structure that had been reared to noble living and Christly service. Sense seems to have won in the war with Soul in that "last, dim, weird battle of the west," when Arthur stands in the misty twilight above the heaps of slain—a King only "among the dead," and himself sorely wounded unto death. The best he can say is:

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfills himself in many ways."

The mystic barge bore him away into the far distance, and to the listening and watching Sir Bedevere,

"Then from out the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint,
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a King returning from his wars."

And thus at least he who, though apparently overcome by the forces of evil, had kept faith with all high purposes and right causes, had himself won the victor's crown, and somewhere, somehow, but darkly discerned, the moral sense affirms that the things of the spirit must conquer.

If in the *Vision of Sin* and in the *Idylls of the King* it is the sins of the senses that bring the tragic harvest of both individual and collective failure, if nothing stands permanently when unrighteousness of the coarser sort sits upon the throne of life, with God watching in the shadow, in *The Palace of Art* Tennyson approached the age-old conflict of good and evil from another standpoint. Here it is the soul that has sinned against itself by refusing to share even its refined joys with all mankind. In the dedication to the poem he himself calls it "a sort of allegory" of a "sinful soul possessed of many gifts," that "did love beauty only," forgetting that

"Beauty, good, and knowledge are three sisters
That dote upon each other, friends to man,

> Living together under the same roof,
> And never can be sundered without tears."

But the soul builded for herself a "lordly pleasure house" into which was gathered for her enjoyment all that was best in the world's knowledge, philosophy, and art. But by and by there pressed upon her, shut up in her measureless self-content, "a scorn of herself"—the Palace became "a spot of dull stagnation," "a crumbling tomb, girt round with blackness as a solid wall." In agony of disillusionment and despair, she began to cry:

> "What is it that will take away my sin,
> And save me lest I die?"

And she throws away her royal robes to "build a cottage in the vale" where she "may mourn and pray," and—

> "Perchance I may return with others there
> When I have purged my guilt."

Thus it is that the most characteristic voice of the century, in the midst of the shifting intellectual and spiritual moods of a period that strained men's faith as no other period had done, uses not only the older allegorical methods with which we have grown familiar, but the message itself is new only in the sense that we are made aware that the ancient moralities are being applied to meet the demands of different conditions of life and thought. The meaning of sin and righteousness, the unfailing worth of spiritual values, the concept of a moral order with God in control—these

have not changed. It is in them that Tennyson finds the measure of human greatness in his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* as Wordsworth before him did in *The Happy Warrior*. The truth of the matter is that, in all probability, this estimate of the great soldier represents a kind of idealized expression of the typically heroic in the thought of the race, and when the poet attributes such qualities to the Iron Duke he is actually interpreting the spiritual aspirations of the race in terms of a concrete example of large and achieving manhood. It is not enough that Wellington was "the foremost captain of his time," "rich in saving common sense," that his life was one long "self-sacrifice" for worthy causes, and that, as to others of his race, so to him the path of simple duty became the way to glory, because he found—

> "The toppling crags of Duty scaled
> Are close upon the shining table-lands
> To which our God Himself is moon and sun—"

but from him we learn to know in general that there is nothing "greater than soul," and "on God and Godlike men to build our trust."

Thus in the midst of the storms of political, social, and intellectual unrest, the poet is doing much more than paying a deserved tribute to the victor of Waterloo, but is rather presenting him, the incarnation of the granite solidity of the familiar fundamental virtues, as the only security in a confused and unsteady world. These suffer neither substitution nor change, and at least to

them we may hold when all else seems dark and uncertain. And here, as elsewhere, Tennyson's faith in the austere simplicities of the spiritual life is of a kind with that of Milton and Wordsworth. Beaten by wild winds of varying doctrines in the strange new times, he clung for safety, as it were, to the ancient moral inheritances, and, in this respect, kept unbroken a literary lineage whose roots were in the farthest English past.

In *In Memoriam,* however, he is genuinely and representatively the man of his century; and if an epic poem is a record and an interpretation of a great historic mood and movement, then is *In Memoriam* epic in its character. To be sure, starting with the shock of an apparently incurable personal bereavement, it seems at first so intimately individual to the poet himself that it sounds as but a bitter cry out of his own heart for a broken friendship that can never be healed. However, he was seventeen slow years in the writing of it, from 1833 to 1850, and the great movements of thought and experience that influenced profoundly the intellectual and spiritual life of his generation are the sources of its unfolding development. The poem, therefore, ceases to be narrowly individual and personal and becomes broadly typical and representative. In this sense it is epical—the accepted record of the mind's strivings after spiritual reality under the tremendous pressure of fresh conceptions of the universe and man's place in it—conceptions that necessi-

tated the examination once more of the fundamentals of belief. God, nature, man, love, death, immortality, virtue, duty, the accepted creeds, the meaning of life, both individual and collective, law, the problem of good and evil, faith, progress—these supreme concepts of the mind, all related as they are to human happiness and contentment, are the themes over which the poet broods with anxious inquiries and which he so universalizes as that the flawless measures of his verse become the representative voice of the entire era.

And so *In Memoriam* is also another Pilgrim's Progress for the soul of man. But his wanderings are through a different kind of world from that through which Bunyan had his Pilgrim go, and he must stand the test of temptations quite strange to those that beset so sorely his Puritan ancestor. But they are none the less real because they are of the mind rather than of the flesh, and the nineteenth-century Pilgrim loses himself in a Slough of Doubt rather than the Slough of Despond because his intellect is baffled in the effort to understand the meaning of the newer knowledge, and the wings of his spirit droop in a twilight of lost gods. But he struggles on, visioning at last

> "The crowning race
> Of those that, eye to eye, shall look
> On knowledge; under whose command
> Is Earth and Earth's, and in their hand
> Is Nature like an open book,"

and holding a faith in

"That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

This the Pilgrim of the seventeenth century could not have understood, but it is the only way his nineteenth-century successor could have affirmed that he, too, had come upon the Delectable Mountains of vision where he was ready to see the face of God and sense the meaning of the reality behind the fitful dream called Life. But this was the goal each was striving to arrive at, though over widely differing paths. Perhaps, however, the pilgrims and prophets of the former days—proclaimers of spiritual truth, interpreters of the majesty of the moral law, believers in God and Soul as all of them were, though, even with Tennyson as a guide, they would be sorely perplexed along the roads over which he might lead them—would understand what he means when he reaches the summit to which his faith at last climbs:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

Thine are these orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot
Is on the skull which thou hast made.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him; thou art just.

Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood, thou.
Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours, to make them thine."

When one turns from even such a climactic expression of faith as this to listen to the resonant, confidently assertive voice of Robert Browning, one is apt to sense in Tennyson a certain hesitancy as of one who but doubtingly feels his way through the intellectual confusions of his day, who bases his faith on dim hopes rather than on clear convictions, and who is still "a child crying in the night" upon the "altar stairs" that lead to God. With an insight that penetrates deeper, a range of knowledge that went farther in time and place, with a sharper dramatic intensity, and with a much greater variety of form, Browning, from the very beginning of his career as a poet, sounded depths of spiritual understanding quite beyond the reach of his fellow-craftsman in the art of interpreting life, and announced his message with the assurance of one who knew what he had seen. Does he not say in *Pauline,* the first heir of his young invention—

"Unknown secrets will be trusted me
Which were denied the waverer once; but now
I shall be priest and prophet as of old.

Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth
And love."

And Paracelsus, too, passionate seeker after truth and knowledge and the power they bring, having left love out of life, comes to understand that truth

alone is not enough, that life is not complete except as love and knowledge are joined in indissoluble wedlock, and that somehow in the endless future it will be given him to atone for the tragedy of his earthly failure:

> "If I stoop
> Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
> It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
> Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
> Will pierce the gloom; I shall emerge one day."

Thus, in the two earliest poems, one would not find it hard to discover at least the germs of Browning's characteristic philosophy of life and its meaning—faith, love, soul, infinite spiritual progress, the glory of the imperfect, the use of the endless future for the rectifying of life's wrongs and failures, the final triumph of good over evil, supreme moments of experience that determine the worth of life and its final destiny, and the presence of God in the world directing and controlling. These have become the familiar commonplaces of the Browning interpretation of the riddle of existence, and they still have the power to hearten the soul and serve as an invigorating spiritual tonic in moods of doubt and pessimism. To his generation, moreover, his voice rang with the challenging peal of a trumpet, rallying the forces of the children of light to do gallant battle for the spiritual realities at a time when the forces of darkness were pressing hard upon those who would still stand by the ancient fundamentals

of religious faith. These fundamentals shone with a compelling radiance out of the obscurities of his style and the strangely involved windings and twistings which he gave to normal verse forms. At any rate, those who understood, or thought they did, recognized in him one who had mastered the multitudinous knowledge of his day, who spoke as a modern man to modern men, and in speaking seemed to be planting afresh the old truths of religion upon the newer truths that were accumulating from so many and so various sources. He might go into strange byways to make his applications of the older truths—to Greece and Rome, the Hebrew Scriptures, the distant East, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, literature, art, music, science, curious philosophies and myths—and yet somehow all paths become at last bright with the familiar beacons that have guided the faith of the race in the past.

To be sure, the appeal of Browning to his contemporaries was, compared to that of Tennyson, a limited one. Clubs, made up chiefly of the intellectuals, had to be organized to understand him, and the study of his poetry developed into the nature of a cult. But his audience, while confined to the few, was an extraordinarily fit audience, and from it came a large body of Browning literature that served to spread widely the poet's characteristic ideas and to make generally known at least a small group of poems in which these ideas were expressed not only with distinction but also with

such clearness that even he who runs might read and understand. In this way his influence was greatly extended, and he acquired an audience not even relatively insignificant in point of numbers. For example, the average reader of poetry needs no expert interpreter to explain certain parts of *A Death in the Desert,* in which is expressed faith in God's purpose and method for the infinite progress of man:

> "Man knows partly but conceives beside,
> Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
> And in this striving, this converting air
> Into a solid he may grasp and use,
> Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
> Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
> Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."

Moreover, this progress has the eternal years of God for its endless process of fruition, and the glory of what we strive for in this life belongs to those with the far vision, who, believing it is "God's task to make the heavenly period perfect the earthen," leave "now for dogs and apes" because "man has forever." These are they who have really learned how to live, for, throwing themselves on God, "unperplexed, seeking they shall find Him." The musician in *Abt Vogler* so found Him in that ecstasy of spiritual understanding when the high palace of music his art had reared seemed to vanish beyond his ability to capture again:

> "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
> Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good nor power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once; we shall hear it by-and-by."

There is ever in Browning a gallant audacity of faith in the conception that God will work out for fine and noble ends the sins, the confusions, the darkness, the awful wreckage of human life, both individual and collective. In this sense he, like Milton, "asserts Eternal Providence" and seeks to "justify the ways of God to men." Stand with him by the "little Doric Morgue" in the poem entitled *Apparent Failure,* and look on the hideous horror of the havoc men have wrought upon themselves: "Poor men, God made, and all for that!" Yet even there in the presence of the dead faces, the wings of his faith are lifted for a daring flight:

"My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after Last, returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst."

Or walk with the little factory girl in *Pippa Passes* as she takes her sunshine holiday with innocence in her heart and the joy of song bubbling from her lips. About her, but behind closed doors, there is all manner of sin and crime, and the very air is heavy and fetid with the miasma of human baseness. What of life, what of the world of men

and women? Where is God anyway in a universe so degraded and so soiled by the regnant forces of evil? The answer to such questionings is not an argument, but a song of faith out of the heart of a child:

> "The year's at the spring
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven;
> The hill-side's dew-pearled;
> The lark's on the wing,
> The snail's on the thorn;
> God's in his heaven—
> All's right with the world!"

And the murky air somehow seems clarified and cleansed as if by a wind from the far heights of a purer spiritual atmosphere in which the soul can draw a wholesome breath because faith affirms that God must forever be on the side of the forces that make for righteousness.

Browning packs into *Rabbi Ben Ezra* no little of the inspiring philosophy that gives significance to so much of his poetry. Youth and age, each in its own way, are a part of the divine plan, and the things of life, with its infinite variety of experience, flesh, and soul, are all but parts of a complete design, and the planner is God:

> "I see the whole design,
> I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
> Perfect I call Thy plan:
> Thanks that I was a man!
> Maker, remake, complete—I trust what thou shalt do!"

And certain that amid all earth's changes the "soul and God stand sure," the poet of the great

faith commits the final issues of life to Him who gave it:

"So, take and use thy work,
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!"

No hesitancy here, no timidity of the spirit in the presence of the supreme mysteries, no faintly trusting the larger hope, but a buoyant lift of the soul into the divine keeping as confident in its convictions as ever David was in those moments when he was most aware that he had found a resting place in the strength and wisdom of God.

And is it too much to say that the spirit of David sings again in the magic beauty and profoundly suggestive thought of Browning's *Saul?* To the intellectually confused and spiritually blinded nineteenth century this poem, a marvelous blending of both the Old and the New Testaments in its essential conceptions, must have seemed like a flame of light flashing through the encompassing darkness of a world shadowed in the night of lost or dimmed faiths. It will be recalled that the starting point of the poem is from the incident of David's being sent for to bring comfort to King Saul with the music of harp and song. In the effort to restore Saul, the tragic failure, to his best self the young poet sings of the beauty of nature, the familiar procession of the seasons, the joys of living, the achievements of the soldier and

statesman, the satisfaction of fame, the dreams of great ambitions. But none is of any avail, and the singer becomes aware only of a mighty consuming love for the broken, defeated man before him and of a passion, born of this love, to give his all to redeem him, and—

"Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no song more outbroke—
'I have gone the whole round of creation; I saw and I spoke:
. . . . . .
I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law.'"

Out of the unfathomed depths of his own love he visions the infinite reaches of God's love with power to—

"Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now—and bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life—a new harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—or endure!
The man taught enough, by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this."

The inspired mood of the prophet lifts for him the veil of the future, and the vision of the Christ to be shines forth at last:

"'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee, a man like to me,
Thou shall love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

So love in the heart of man for man found its way to love in the heart of God, and out of this supreme

adventure of faith made the spirit's greatest discovery—the Christ, the divine love incarnate, through whom the gates of the new life are thrown open for the redemption of life's failures and the perfection of its imperfections. And Robert Browning takes his place in the high company of those who through the changing centuries have kept shining the radiant beauty and incomparable worth of the unchanging spiritual realities.

With the death of John Ruskin on the twentieth day of January, 1900, passed the last of the great prophets of the century. Carlyle had already passed nineteen years before, Browning eleven, and Tennyson eight. And they belonged together, for not only in the term of years that measured the span of their lives were they contemporaries, but also in the deeper matter of their battle to maintain the supremacy of the things of the spirit. It is this, their ceaseless struggle, each in his own characteristic way, for the spiritual realities behind all appearances, that makes them akin as brothers of the soul, because it was the soul of man and its moral fidelities that each sought to save in the midst of the world's crude and crass materialism, and to keep shining in the storms of change a lighthouse of faith for the soul's guidance. For is not Tennyson's final word suggestive of this for all of them?

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

. . . . . .

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar."

And Browning, too, as usual more confidently affirmative, closes his message with the spirit's invincible shout of victory when he sings of—

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
'Strive and thrive!' cry 'Speed—fight on, fare ever
There as here!'"

With the silencing of these mighty voices at the close of the century none others followed to continue in either content or style their greatness. Swiftly the years rolled along, sweeping the world, with something of the blindness of fate, into the colossal tragedy of 1914. Since 1918 there have hung over all the leaden clouds of disillusionment and a cynical disenchantment, with no great winds of the spirit to clear and cleanse the murky atmosphere. For the time the spiritual tradition that has persisted through the long centuries seems to have sunk into eclipse, and the literature of the day is singularly wanting in the ideas and ideals that have given significance and distinction to what has been most representative of English Letters in the past. In the name of a scientific

understanding of life it is apt to be concerned chiefly with an abnormal psychology and the realistic, sordid details of the common and the vile. It taps the sewers and lifts the covers of the garbage cans, and frequently, in the language of the blackguard, and yet with the strutting manner of a discoverer, informs us that for the first time literature is dealing with the actual stuff of human nature and human experience. But may we not venture to believe that we are looking just for a time at the ugly mudflats, with the tides only temporarily gone out, and that those spiritual ideals that have persisted so long will sweep in to fill again the thoughts of those to whom literature is a sacred art devoted to the beauty of holiness as well as to the holiness of beauty, and once more it will serve to nourish the souls of men and steady and enlighten their faith in the things that are true, and honest, and just, and lovely, and of good report? It must do this if it is loyal to the inspirations that, through twelve centuries, from Cædmon to the last of the great Victorians, have informed the literature of the English-speaking people with a large richness of spiritual content and an unfailing fidelity to the abiding moralities.

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